DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 458 050 RC 022 561

TITLE	Networks and Clusters in the Rural Challenge: A Special Report to the Rural School and Community Trust.
INSTITUTION	Harvard Univ., Cambridge, MA. Graduate School of Education.; Rural School and Community Trust, Washington, DC.
PUB DATE	2000-06-00
NOTE	93p.
AVAILABLE FROM	Rural School and Community Trust, Publications Manager, 1825 K Street, NW, Suite 703, Washington, DC 20006 ($10).
PUB TYPE	Reports - Research (143)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC04 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Educational Change; *Educational Cooperation; Elementary Secondary Education; Interschool Communication; *Networks; Organization; *Rural Schools; School Community Relationship
IDENTIFIERS	*Annenberg Rural Challenge; *Networking; Peer Support; Place Based Education; Rural School and Community Trust

ABSTRACT

An important feature of the Annenberg Rural Challenge (now the Rural School and Community Trust) was the insistence that all funded projects be organized around networks and clusters. These networks/clusters aimed to help overcome the isolation of rural schools and communities and to multiply possibilities for sharing resources and enlarging the work on place-based education. This report synthesizes information gathered on network and cluster formation, structure, and function over the 4 years of the Rural Challenge grant. An introduction discusses theories on networks in educational settings, the Rural Challenge's vision of rural school reform, earlier rural reform movements, and the Rural Challenge's networking strategies and goals. The 35 distinct projects of the Rural Challenge are then sorted among three types of networks/clusters: large statewide networks that serve as intermediary organizations to smaller clusters of schools and communities; specific program networks that develop and implement fairly well-defined programs in clusters of rural schools; and small clusters that are geographically contiguous, frequently within one county. The three types of networks/clusters are discussed in terms of networking tools and strategies for communicating among members; network evolution; specific missions related to place-oriented curriculum development, community economic development, revitalization of languages and cultures, educational policy reform, and social justice advocacy; their effects on school-community relationships; and implications for the future of the Rural Challenge/Rural Trust. An appendix details 29 projects/networks. (Contains 23 references.) (SV)

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Networks and Clusters in the Rural Challenge

A Special Report to the Rural School and Community Trust

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Networks and Clusters in the Rural Challenge

A Special Report to the Rural School and Community Trust

June 2000

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NETWORKS AND CLUSTERS IN THE RURAL CHALLENGE [1]

Preface

One of the important features of the Annenberg Rural Challenge was the insistence that all funded projects be organized around networks and clusters. The belief was that these networks and clusters would help overcome the isolation of rural schools and communities and multiply the possibilities for sharing resources and enlarging the work around place.

This report synthesizes the information we have gathered on network and cluster formation, structure and function over the now four years of the Annenberg Rural Challenge grant that has established, supported, deepened the work of place in over 700 rural schools and communities across the country. The report is intended primarily for the Board of Directors and staff of the Rural Schools and Community Trust, the national organization that has developed out of the original Annenberg funded project. It will also be of interest, we believe, to the many participants in Rural Challenge/Rural Trust sites as it will offer them a view of their connections within a project, a network or cluster, as well as within the entire scope of the Annenberg Rural Challenge/Rural Schools and Community Trust organization. Further, we hope this report will contribute valuable information to educators, policy makers, researchers and community activists who are interested in the structure and function of networks and clusters in contemporary school reform and community renewal initiatives.

After a brief introduction which addresses the importance of networks as one of the starting places for the Rural Challenge initiative, we then provide a taxonomy of the evolving collaborations and networks among Rural Challenge/Rural Trust projects with respect to several identifying dimensions. We first divide the 35 projects to date into three major categories: 1) pre-existing national networks that enlarged their work to include rural sites or expanded their original base as a result of the Rural Challenge; 2) statewide or geographically/culturally defined networks that existed prior to the Annenberg Challenge grant but were able to enlarge their base as a result of funding, or new geographically or culturally defined networks that grew out of the funding opportunity; and 3) clusters of various sizes, but typically small, that initially developed out of the funding requirements for the Annenberg Rural Challenge site grants. We then look at this variety of structures as it plays out across several dimensions: organizational structure, schools and districts, partners and allies, networking tools and programs and, finally, mission and focus of each network or cluster. We provide some conclusions regarding the success of the networks and clusters to accomplish what was hoped of them and speculate on the durability of these relationships as the Rural Challenge funding comes to an end and the new, non-grantmaking organization—the Rural School and Community Trust—carries on supporting the work of place in schools and communities.

There is included an extensive appendix of data sheets on twenty-nine of the projects currently involved in this work. We believe that this detailed information will serve to illustrate to Rural Trust members as well as a wider audience, the large nature of this work, the many resources and affiliations that support it, and the variety, yet consistency, of mission as well as process in undertaking this work on behalf of students, parents and community members living in rural places.

Julie Canniff organized and conducted the primary research for this report. Vito Perrone contributed greatly to its final version with the generous contributions of Sylvia Parker, David Ruff, Jerry Hoffman, Larry Rogers, Candace Cochrane, Doug Wood, Anya Enos, Elaine Salinas, Barbara Poore, Carla Fontaine, Polly Ulichny, Vicki Nelson and Marty Strange.

Cambridge, Massachusetts June 2000

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[1] We use Rural Challenge in this report, primarily because of the time period under discussion. We wish to acknowledge, however, the new name of the organization--The Rural School and Community Trust.

The Rural Challenge work has given us a model of working in clusters of schools that is rich in content and robust in how it functions. Teachers, administrators, community members and students can see both the big picture of how education ought to work, and the small picture of what their role is each day, each hour. Other clusters of schools and individuals bring different strengths to help give a region-wide network vitality beyond the sum of its parts (Appalachian Rural Education Network, 1997).

Introduction

Networks are at the core of the various Annenberg Challenges, begun in 1995 with a generous gift from Walter Annenberg. In the urban Challenges, the vision is of large, intermediate networks that function at the institutional level and support networks of teachers at the school level. The assumption among the early leaders of the Annenberg Challenges was that these "intermediary organizations," or networks independent of local school district structures, would provide the power needed to strengthen individual schools and accelerate the kind of change that would bring about a school reform movement. According to Barbara Cervone, who has been responsible for the operational aspects of the Annenberg Challenges, the goal of the intermediary organizations was to foster systemic school change by activating networks at the school level with the hope that they would encourage teacher learning and school-to-school accountability.

In the case of the Annenberg Rural Challenge, an initial consensus about organizing around regional associations gave way to a vision of a national project, with a national director and national board, that was expected to sustain over time a large rural education movement.[2] The concept of networks and clusters was integral to this large national vision, with the understanding that networks or clusters could not simply exist at local school levels and involve educators but would have to include community institutions and community members.[3] The Rural Challenge organization was committed to the belief that reforming schools had to occur alongside community revitalization and sustainability. Thus, the founders expected that the networks or clusters would not only communicate and share resources, but would collaborate with various community institutions to make the history, the environment, the social relationships and/or the economics of local communities a more explicit part of what teachers and students addressed in their learning.

In pursuing such a direction, the Rural Challenge was building on a long tradition of rural reform movements that used networks of farmers or tradesmen to influence policies that would keep them competitive in the national market. It also drew on the more recent tradition of teacher networks which have provided practitioners with "discourse communities where teachers address tough problems of teaching through an exchange among members rather than being talked at by experts" (Lieberman & McLaughlin, 1992, Firestone & Pennell, 1997).

In this report, we offer a perspective on the ways in which the networks and clusters were formed and have evolved over the nearly four years of the Annenberg Rural Challenge grant. The report addresses the structure and mission of the networks and clusters, some of the history and theory around network and cluster strategies, the ways in which they have facilitated changes in relationships between schools and communities, and whether they have inspired a movement for rural school reform consistent with the Rural Challenge philosophy.

. . . the pattern of life is a network pattern. Whenever you see the phenomenon of life, you observe networks (F. Capra, 1994).

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[2] Vito Perrone, "A Brief History of the Annenberg Rural Challenge," an appendix in *Learning from Rural Communities: Alaska to Alabama*, 1997.

Review of Theoretical Perspectives

In *Crossing Lines: Research and Policy Networks for Developing Country Education,* edited by Noel McGinn, the various authors address a number of questions concerning networks. Leo Dubbeldam, for example, asks, "Is the purpose of a network to generate knowledge or simply transmit information?" If the answer is to generate knowledge, he suggests the smaller the network, the more intimate the interactions among members, the more likely the members will invest time and resources in search of a common objective. On the other hand, he suggests that when networks become large, people will likely not know one another intimately and communication will occur mostly through "newsletters, mailings or formal meetings" (p. 15).

There is general agreement in the educational literature that networks facilitate the exchange of information and resources and boost efficiency by reducing the effects of time and distance. We are all familiar with networks linked to libraries, museums, or the arts that are organized to exchange services; other networks allow people to exchange skills or to find partners for a particular learning exchange. However, McGinn and his colleagues also ask readers to consider the purposes for which networks form and connect those purposes to the more fundamental question of whether the network is in search of an expressive goal such as social change, or whether the objective is a more pragmatic information exchange.

By insisting that funded sites include community people and local social, governmental and economic development agencies in the structure of the networks and clusters, Rural Challenge founders recognized that the initial stages of the work would consist primarily of exchanging information and resources. However, they understood that their vision of social change would assume greater prominence as relationships deepened. Moreover, they also believed that as network and cluster members learned from one another, they would begin to connect the needs of communities for social services, environmental support, cultural and recreational activities, or job creation to the various academic programs inside schools.

David Clark (1996), who writes about networks in Great Britain, believes that the more successful networks are geographically linked and share the same social and environmental concerns. Successful networks, according to Clark, also tend to be non-hierarchical, distributing power and expectations horizontally. Many of the Rural Challenge/Rural Trust networks and clusters have this characteristic.

Michael Huberman (1995) informs us that networks in educational settings come in different sizes. A "limited network" is one in which a biology teacher, for instance, consults other science colleagues in the same school in order to adjust a problem in a solitary classroom. A "collective open network" by contrast is one in which biology teachers from different schools, districts or regions exchange classroom practices and curriculum units, interact with specialists from technical fields, conduct observations of one another's classrooms and/or engage in peer coaching and critique (Huberman, 1995). The Rural Challenge envisioned both of these kinds of exchanges. Further, Huberman observes that the level of sophistication of a network determines the potential for its members to experiment with new forms of pedagogy and influences the potential for significant learning within a relatively safe, non-judgmental environment. The more successful the interactions, he notes, the more likely it is that the network will endure and expand to connect with other networks.

Relatedly, a number of scholars have begun to look at the power of teacher networks to not only change teaching practice but to influence the culture of schooling (Adams, 1992; Clune, 1993; Lieberman & McLaughlin, 1992; Little, 1993). Firestone and Pennell (1997) describe two state-sponsored teacher networks in Vermont and California that were linked, in different ways, to state policies and were organized to support the implementation of specific initiatives. In their conclusion, Firestone and Pennell highlight the special qualities of the networks in meeting the needs of individual teachers, some of whom simply wanted practical information they could

[3] The tie to people in local communities is a unique feature of the Rural Challenge.

easily apply to their classrooms, and others who were inspired by the opportunity to construct new ways of doing things. Such networks benefited most those teachers who desired to test their own ideas rather than depend on outside experts to deliver information.

This tension between constructing one's own knowledge and relying on outside experts has been a frequent theme in rural school reform scholarship. Paul Nachtigal, drawing on nearly two decades of work on rural reform issues, provided much of the philosophical and pragmatic rationale behind organizing the Rural Challenge work into clusters of small rural schools. Nachtigal consistently pointed out that rural communities are proud of being self-sufficient and have built up long-term resentments against outside "experts wanting to do something *to* rural communities not *with* them" (Nachtigal, 1980, p.130). Consequently, he suggests that networks in rural areas should originate at the local level and be led by people who are familiar with, and have a frame of reference for, the specific concerns of rural schools.[4]

Finally, Fritjof Capra provides a perspective on networks that coincides with the larger vision of the Rural Challenge founders. At an Ecoliteracy retreat in 1994, Capra pointed out that networks are synonymous with patterns of life. He stated that because networks are nonlinear, they cause "feedback loops" which prompt organizations to learn from mistakes and mis-directions. Further, he noted:

> When you have a network, a community can regulate itself. It can learn from its mistakes because the mistakes will travel and come back along these feedback loops. Then you can learn, and next time around you can do it differently. It does not need an outside authority to tell it, "You guys did something wrong." A community has its own intelligence, its own learning capability. Development and learning are always part of the very essence of life because of this network pattern (Capra, 1994).

Capra also reveals that successful networks, likened to ecosystems which depend on keeping relationships in balance to maintain themselves, depend on cooperation and partnership in order to survive. Maintaining balance, he states, requires that the ecosystem be flexible, understanding that every system undergoes fluctuations. The ability to adjust to fluctuations, he notes, is the "way ecosystems remain resilient."

Capra offers valuable insights into how ecosystems which have some relevance for networks and clusters are sustained. The networks that have developed strong relationships, multiple links with other networks, he suggests, have the greatest potential for surviving. It is perhaps this element that best exemplifies the Annenberg Rural Challenge philosophy. Networks structured around interdependence, partnerships, and flexibility are the most likely to take root and grow, to be in a position to engage in a larger rural school reform *movement*.

You have to teach people who work with you in the name of a group . . . to value their own experience, analyze their own experience and make decisions, and decisions [have] to be real decisions (Horton, Kohl & Kohl 1990, p. 57).

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[4] The theoretical literature speaks of networks as associations of individuals and groups engaged in a common endeavor. In these terms, what the Rural Trust calls *clusters*, smaller associations, relatively informal, often non-binding, often engaging people and schools that have not previously worked together, are, in essence, small networks. In the Rural Challenge, however, they have been thought of as different from the Rural Challenge *networks*. We will make the distinctions clear as we engage the subject of typologies.

The Annenberg Rural Challenge: A Continuing Vision of Rural School Reform

One of the early goals of the Annenberg Rural Challenge was "to support or help create a powerful and sustainable rural school reform movement that actively involves families, communities, the broader public as well as educational professionals" (Sher 1995, p. 147). The language of a rural reform movement has served to inspire people responsible for sustaining the larger Rural Challenge/Rural Trust work in various schools and communities. Further, the "movement" language has become an integral feature of the Rural Challenge/Rural Trust Public Policy work as it advocates for policies that strengthen the relationship between schools and communities. The "movement" language is also consistent with the expectation that the Rural Challenge/Rural Trust networks and clusters will move their work from "add-on" projects that mirror Rural Challenge/Rural Trust criteria, to the demonstrable, systemic change of school culture and the development of school-community mutuality. It is perhaps in this regard that the Annenberg Rural Challenge/Rural Trust claims its place in a long tradition of agrarian and social reform movements that utilized the principles of networking and collaboration in order to link schools aimed at maintaining vibrant, productive rural places. [5]

Earlier Rural Reform Movements

Reform movements which emphasized collaboration among rural schools, religious institutions, business and policy-making bodies can be found in the Country Life Movement at the turn of this century, the Antigonish Movement in the Canadian Maritimes, as well as a number of long-standing social change movements such as the Industrial Areas Foundation and the Highlander School. These early twentieth century reform movements developed in response to the apprehensions that characterized a society faced with profound social and economic transformation. Each movement emphasized revitalizing entire communities through a multiplicity of means, with education being a central component of the process. Locally-based networks became catalysts for change by motivating families, schools, churches and social welfare agencies to confront issues such as isolation, consolidation, declining populations, and fading economies.

The Country Life Movement contributed to a variety of local cooperative associations across rural America. And it generated considerable interest in the power of collectives to maintain and sustain local institutions as well as enlarge the quality of life in small communities.[6]

The Highlander Folk School, which continues to focus on community building and social reform, is guided by the vision of Miles Horton who emphasized that "a large social movement

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[5] It might be useful to outline here the principles that have come to guide the Rural Challenge, now Rural Trust work. These principles have become more embedded in the work of schools, networks and clusters.

- Student work is intellectually powerful, embedded in the local setting, holds personal meaning and is authentic--related to "real life."
- Community expectations for learning include a large focus on the local environment, work outside of school, long-term projects, active learning and public performance of academic work.
- School and community interactions are rich, complex, varied and natural.
- Schools and communities actively collaborate in seeking to make the local environment a good place in which to live and work.
- Students value their local places and see them as having the potential to sustain a life of quality.
- School decision-making is responsibly and democratically determined by the people the school serves for the benefit of the entire community.
- All students, regardless of circumstances (economic, age, special needs, cultural, linguistic, geographic, etc.), have access to and participate in high quality educational experiences.

[6] The following texts provide useful accounts of this important work: Liberty Hyde Bailey, *The Country Life Movement in the United States*, (New York: Macmillan, 1915); Liberty Hyde Bailey, *The State and the Farmer*, (New York: Macmillan, 1918); and William Bowers, *The Country Life Movement in America, 1910-1920*, (NY: Kennikat Press, 1974).

forces people to take a stand for or against it so there are no longer any neutrals.... Another thing social movements do is radicalize people. People learn from the movement to go beyond the movement.... [B]y radicalize I mean through the experience of being part of a social movement people understand they must change the system" (Horton, Kohl & Kohl, 1990, p.123).[7]

Horton learned early on to trust the wisdom of groups of people who have a personal stake in a particular problem. He guided individuals who had a strong investment in their places to seek alliances among different constituencies and he taught them to trust one another, using their collective resources to build the kind of society they envisioned.

Importantly, these earlier rural reform movements exposed the issues that differentiate rural concerns from urban concerns when it comes to changing "the system." Rural communities are isolated from urban centers by more than geography, and yet they long have been pressured to march to the tune of urban policies with regard to education and economics. Nonetheless, networks of rural organizations and cooperatives continue to maintain a fragile balance that helps perpetuate a kind of self-determination for small towns and villages. The legacy from the past is evident in the intentional decision that Rural Challenge/Rural Trust projects would form clusters and networks in order to strengthen their resolve to sustain and grow their communities.

The strategy that we use at the national level, or the rationale, is that if we are going to help folks think about education in a different way, we need some examples of what that might look like. We need to engage our communities in a discussion about education and the questions I think are important are: What is education for? Whose interests get served by public schools? and, Who gets to make the decisions? (Nachtigal, Annenberg Rural Challenge National Rendezvous, 1998)

Networks and Clusters: Espoused Theory of Action

As a member of the original planning committee for the Rural Challenge, Jonathan Sher was an outspoken and visionary participant in linking concepts of an educational reform movement to the goals of the Rural Challenge.

> The rural school movement [will] involve a cross-section of allies . . . the desire is to develop a critical mass of students, parents, and grandparents, school board members, policy makers, rural funders, members of the media, ordinary rural citizens who [will join] together to make genuinely good rural schools a deeply entrenched reality across rural America (Sher, 1995, p. 148).

Sher's particular motivation for restructuring schools had to do with his longstanding repudiation of the urban model of schooling which is "buried deep within state and federal policies, standards of school accreditation, college admissions, professional training programs and the hearts and minds of administrators and decision-makers" (p. 144). Rural schools, he noted, are intrinsically community-based and as such have the potential to transform education by integrating the work of schools with issues which are of concern to particular communities. By forming natural alliances, rural schools are able, he believed, to not only share resources and ideas, but also to withstand state mandates that impose the kinds of conditions that ultimately result in consolidation.

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[7] Horton's use of "radicalization" might not match the current history of the Rural Challenge/Rural Trust, but clearly the vision set forth by the Rural Challenge/Rural Trust is radical in the current environment--in opposition to standardization of schooling, the separation of schools and communities, consolidation, corporate structures that impinge on local decision-making, the disparagement of local languages and cultures.

The plan developed by Sher and the Rural Challenge planning committee was to invest in the power of networks or clusters that shared a similar vision of rural school reform. Even as they articulated the basic strategy of the Rural Challenge with regard to setting up and sustaining rural networks and clusters, their intent was for the Rural Challenge to move well beyond these networks of professionals and institutions by inspiring a rural school reform movement across the country.[8]

Paul Nachtigal and Toni Haas, co-directors of the Rural Challenge, were tremendously influential in converting their long experience with rural school reform into the Rural Challenge's theory of action.[9] Nachtigal was clear that the Rural Challenge would not go the way of many of the Ford Foundation projects of the 1960s. The failure of the Ford Foundation programs, he believed, was that they depended heavily on outside experts to deliver curriculum changes to teachers, thus initiating a school reform movement from the top.[10] By funding clusters and networks that were broad-based, Haas, Nachtigal and others anticipated that students, parents, or a coalition of teachers and community people might become the leaders of Rural Challenge work.

According to Paul Nachtigal and Sylvia Parker (1990), the rationale for clustering schools and communities begins with the premise that small schools do not have the resources to address comprehensive programs alone. The optimum size for a cluster, they believed, was no more than eight schools of similar size that agreed to collaborate for a minimum of three years. Giving the cluster *time* to work is key. "Individual schools must have a chance to learn how to think cooperatively" (p. 3). The advantages of such an alliance, they suggested, are as potentially diverse as the clusters themselves. For instance, clusters which are focused at the school/community level can share local resources, facilities, advanced courses, even sports and arts activities among the members. At the district level, clusters can be involved in curriculum development, economic development for their communities or serve as training sites for pre-service teachers. Clusters which are organized and joined together at a state-wide level can also have an advantage, Nachtigal and Parker believed, in being able to advocate for policy changes in school funding formulas, consolidation decisions, or assessment measures. Finally, they pointed out that these clusters offer the opportunity for new leaders to emerge--both from within schools and from within communities. As the programs inspired by cluster-work grow and expand, they suggested, different individuals develop skills in leadership that are responsive to the local place and not dependent on outside expertise to identify and resolve issues. The networks and clusters within the Rural Challenge/Rural Trust have learned much from these insights.[11]

I see some new life breathed into teachers. We have school teachers who're supposed to be educational experts being involved in the community again. And then I have all these people in the community becoming educational experts. [The parents] are getting something more out of this school

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[8] The Rural Challenge, in accordance with the terms of the Annenberg Foundation, had to spend enormous energy in grant-making to networks and clusters, leaving little time for intentionally building/supporting a national rural school/community reform movement.

[9] See Toni Haas and Paul Nachtigal, *Place Value: An Educators' Guide to Good Literature on Rural Lifeways, Environments, and Purposes of Education*, (Eric Clearinghouse/Rural Education and Small Schools, 1998).

[10] *A Foundation Goes To School: The Ford Foundation Comprehensive Improvement Plan, 1960-1970*, (New York: The Foundation, 1972). Nachtigal, who worked with the Ford Foundation, was the principal author of this report.

[11] In our role as documenters, we have seen these networks and clusters grow and change. Many, in which participants seemed initially to have little in common, have found common interests, have begun to learn from one another. What has been particularly interesting has been the cross-cluster and network sharing which has grown because of the various regional and national gatherings of Rural Challenge/Rural Trust participants and the work of the Rural Challenge/Rural Trust Stewards who have regional responsibilities.

than just educating their kids to go somewhere else. I'm very proud of that (Jim Lentz, Superintendent of Schools, Howard, South Dakota, 1997).

Network Strategies and Goals: Evolved Theory of Action

In developing criteria for potential grant recipients, the original Rural Challenge Planning Committee was explicit about three things. First, that grant support be given to clusters or networks of schools. Second, that the individual clusters and networks be encouraged to think of the work in the schools as systemically changing the culture of schooling. And third, that the impact of numerous networks all working for systemic change within rural schools would stimulate a movement for social and economic reform across rural America. The initial Rural Challenge brochure (1995) states:

> The Rural Challenge seeks to reduce the isolation existing among the people and organizations that share a common vision of genuinely good, genuinely rural schools. Becoming a partner carries with it the opportunity and the obligation to work closely with other communities, schools, networks and organizations. In fact, all individual schools supported by Annenberg funds become part of a challenge-related cluster or network of institutions. The idea is to create a critical mass of reformers and allies who--by acting together--can transform rural education.
>
> The Rural Challenge places the overwhelming majority of its resources in those communities, classrooms, schools districts and networks where there are good opportunities to powerfully upgrade the quality of student learning and directly improve the daily reality of public schooling in rural America.
>
> The remaining resources are devoted to changing harmful or obstructive policies toward, and perceptions of, rural schools; connecting pioneering public schools/districts/networks with others intending to move in similar directions, and creating a broad public and professional movement for rural school improvement.

The Planning Committee outlined the following strategy as the basis for enlisting schools and communities to become part of this large Rural Challenge vision:

- Identify key networks or clusters of rural teachers, schools and communities that share a similar vision of rural school reform and have had success in translating that vision into reality.
- Encourage these networks/clusters to participate in the Rural Challenge and invite them to submit proposals describing the ways in which, and the extent to which, they want to be active partners.
- Provide these initial partners with the resources they need individually and collectively to build on their successes and to strengthen their capacity to help other rural schools and communities.
- To search carefully for individual rural schools and communities--especially among people and places historically excluded from the rural education mainstream--that are already engaged in similar reform work or are prepared to make serious commitments to do so.

- Invite these rural schools and communities to become involved in the Rural Challenge by joining one of the existing networks or clusters or by being part of a new cluster of rural school reform partners.
- To link all Rural Challenge partners in a variety of ways and make available the support required for these partners to collaborate closely and to reap the full benefits of these linkages.
- To search for the next groups of people, schools, communities and organizations across rural America demonstrating the greatest potential to become new partners in the Rural Challenge.
- To nurture these groups, connect them with their predecessors and repeat the cycle described above (Sher, 1995, pp. 147-148).

The thirty-five projects now participating in the Rural Challenge/Rural Trust are made up of networks such as the Alaska Rural Challenge/Rural Systemic Initiative, that include sites spread across an entire state, and clusters such as Schleicher County, Texas that includes an elementary, middle and high school, representing the only public schools in the county. Some of the networks, which were in existence long before the Rural Challenge, and the clusters which formed to meet the requirements of Rural Challenge support, have developed additional alliances not only with like-minded schools, but also with state and federal agencies, non-profit organizations and even state legislatures.[12] Within many of these networks and clusters, school cultures are responding to the ideals of the Rural Challenge/Rural Trust and systemic change is occurring. Others are in various stages of systemic school change.

The task of this report is to document the different types of networks that comprise the Rural Challenge/Rural Trust today as well as address their impact on rural schools and communities. Some of the questions we might pose, then, are:

• What are the structures of the Rural Challenge networks and clusters and how have the different structures facilitated their respective goals?

• What are some of the visions that the networks and clusters have in common and how have they gone about their work?

• What can we say about the role of a network or cluster in changing the relationship between the school and the community, and how has that influenced the future outcome for that school and that community?

• How have the networks and clusters inspired, facilitated or implemented the Rural Challenge philosophy of systemic change and with which groups (e.g., students, teachers, administrators, community members, policy makers) has this been the most successful?

We keep in touch with our college kids. We have an amazing database of emails. Anything we do in our community goes out to our kids who are away at college. We have to build on those relationships with our students. We must stay as a group together, identification of culture, identification of race, identification of place (David Rice, Llano Grande Research and Development Center, August, 1999).

---

[12] These alliances, typically called collaborations, were encouraged by the Rural Challenge/Rural Trust as a means of enlarging support and helping bring greater intellectual and moral investment to the work of rural schools and communities. These collaborations have included various state and county historical associations, arts organizations, conservation groups, state and federal departments of natural resources, various colleges and universities, chambers of commerce, agricultural cooperatives and the like.

Rural Challenge/Rural Trust Network Structure

The Annenberg Rural Challenge/Rural Trust, as an entity, has many of the characteristics of a network--multiple activities, differential structures, communication systems, shared purposes, ties to a broad range of constituencies. Giving primary leadership is the Board of Directors, which includes the Grants Committee, and a President.[13] In support of the mission, there are several operational programs--Public Policy, Research and Evaluation, Development, and Communications. While each of these programs has functioned with considerable autonomy, there has been a good deal of sharing of information and resources among the programs, and with the individual projects. Another important structure involves a network of education and community professionals who initially served as "scouts" and have more recently become "stewards." Vito Perrone (1997) described their work as follows:

> The primary responsibility for locating and guiding sites in the application process fell to Rural Challenge Scouts, former teachers, community organizers/activists, and community educators. The Scouts went about their work in different ways. Some made extensive use of networks with which they had long associations, others sent letters to all schools under a particular size (400) providing information about the Rural Challenge, following up with small group meetings; others depended upon leads given them by State Departments of Education, people in local colleges and universities, and community organizations.
>
> To be a Steward is to stay in-touch with the sites, being coaches, giving encouragement, possibly providing resources to support greater depth of practice, sharing the work of others and the like. . . . It is, nonetheless, a difficult role, one in which the pressures around dependency are large. It is also a role that assumes that the Stewards will have ongoing access to assistance around resources.[14]

While the foregoing networking structures exist, the major work of the Rural Challenge/Rural Trust, at least to this point, has existed in the various projects which link schools and communities. The thirty-five projects of the Rural Challenge/Rural Trust are made up of representatives from schools, communities, universities, government agencies and non-profit organizations. While, initially, the projects depended on their related stewards to provide a connection to the larger Rural Challenge organization, today, the projects are forming alliances among one another--within their regional areas and across the United States. These various expanded collaborations have been slower to form, primarily because projects are determining the commonalties among those in or outside of their regions and working out ways to advance the work, while sustaining existing efforts. With the reorganization of the Annenberg Rural Challenge to the Rural School and Community Trust, these larger networks--linkages of several

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[13] In its current iteration as the Rural Trust, presidential leadership is provided by Rachel Tompkins. Prior to the change in the organizational name, the Rural Challenge had Co-directors--Paul Nachtigal and Toni Haas. The Grants Committee has played a particularly important role, reviewing and making recommendations for the expenditures of Annenberg funds to networks and clusters.

[14] The Steward role has evolved over the past several years, likely beyond all the initial expectations. Stewards have come to know the work of the sites more intimately than any other group within the Rural Challenge/Rural Trust. In this role they are both friendly critics and advocates. They are likely to play even more important roles as the Rural Trust seeks to enlarge sites, without a grant structure but with useful information, educational opportunities, powerful associations and large vision as their principal inducements.

existing networks and clusters--will likely enjoy greater prominence as sites determine the individual contributions they can make to the whole.

Rural Challenge Projects[15]

Typologies

The thirty-five separate projects in the Rural Challenge essentially consist of three types of networks/clusters, even as our typologies blur at many points.[16] There are large *statewide networks* that serve as intermediary organizations to smaller clusters of schools and communities; there are *specific program networks* whose mission is to develop and implement fairly well-defined programs in clusters of rural schools, often within as well as across states; and there are *small clusters* which are contiguous within a specific geographic area, frequently within one county.

The *statewide networks* include the Appalachian Rural Education Network (Kentucky and Virginia), Center for School Change (Minnesota), Partnership Rural Initiative in Maine, School at the Center (Nebraska), PACERS Small Schools Cooperative (Alabama), Alaska Rural Challenge/Rural Systemic Initiative and the Program for Rural School and Community Renewal (South Dakota). These networks are characterized by their university affiliations and well-established collaborations with various state agencies, non-profit organizations and funding sources.

Other features of these *statewide networks* are their significant use of outreach personnel who provide technical assistance to individual schools and clusters of schools that are a part of the organization. These networks also establish, on a fairly regular basis, training programs, frequently at central locations, where teachers and administrators come to develop new skills and interact with colleagues from around their respective states.

With their ongoing ties to various external partners, School at the Center, the Maine Partnerships, Center for School Change, Program for Rural School and Community Renewal, Appalachian Rural Education Network, Alaska Rural Challenge/Rural Systemic Initiative and PACERS are perceived as stable, long-term organizations, able to sustain their programs through multiple sources of funding. This status is indispensable in providing them with relative security from which to undertake research and advocacy on behalf of rural educators and school districts in the state.[17]

All of these *statewide networks* existed before the Rural Challenge. They had structures in place to support work in a variety of communities. For example, they already had boards, funding arrangements, ties to collaborating institutions. Becoming part of the Rural Challenge did not, in most cases, alter their overall directions--though it did cause them to focus more of their work around school-community integration and place-oriented curricular initiatives.

The *specific program networks* include the Southern Initiative of the Algebra Project, Bread Loaf Alliance of Rural Educators, Albemarle Learning Center (North Carolina), League of

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[15] See the Appendix for displays of twenty-nine Rural Challenge projects, the ones for which we have comprehensive information. Each project data sheet includes project structure, schools, collaborating partners and affiliated organizations, the tools used to further the work and a brief description of the project's mission and focus.

[16] Typologies of complex organizations are never as tightly drawn as researchers make them. They overlap at many points. But attempts to define these complex organizations through their most common features helps make sense of them.

[17] Increasingly, these *statewide networks* have become involved in policy work in support of rural schools and communities. The Center for School Change and the Alaska Rural Challenge/Rural Systemic Initiative have helped develop state curriculum frameworks/standards that include attention to place and PACERS has gained considerable state support for slowing efforts of consolidation.

Professional Schools (Georgia), REAL (Rural Entrepreneurship through Action Learning) Enterprises, the National Writing Project, the Selborne Project--part of the Roger Tory Peterson Institute in New York--and the two Native American projects in the Southwest--Learn in Beauty (the Navajo Nation) and Circles of Wisdom (organized by the Santa Fe Indian School).[18]

The Algebra Project, Bread Loaf, REAL, and the National Writing Project have long-term relationships with clusters of rural communities across states; Project Albemarle Learning Center, Selborne and the League of Professional Schools have developed programs related to specific school districts; and Learn in Beauty and Circles of Wisdom, both focusing on programs in language and culture, have relationships with numerous Navajo Nation and Pueblo schools and communities respectively.[19]

Several of these organizations are national in focus and their programs are designed around a particular skill or theme such as writing, entrepreneurship, leadership, mathematics and/or democratic schools. For instance, the Algebra Project trainers work to improve student achievement in algebra courses while, at the same time, training parents in the techniques of community organizing and providing students with important leadership skills relating to community development. REAL supports entrepreneurial programs in elementary and secondary schools, and in some cases, active community trainers who work in particular locales.

Some of these networks--Bread Loaf, the League of Professional Schools, School at the Center, Program for Rural School and Community Renewal, PACERS, Center for School Change and the National Writing Project--are affiliated with university departments of education, communication, or the humanities. All of these networks provide technical consultants to assist educators, administrators, or community teams in implementing their programs in the field as well as sponsor training sessions in central locations. They are structured to provide information, research, and communication among the different partners, and are skilled at utilizing a wide variety of networking tools to keep their members informed. As in the case of the *statewide networks*, many have relative stability institutionally and financially.[20]

The majority of the projects are *small clusters*. They include: New Paradigm Partners (Wisconsin), Mariposa County Schools (California), North Coast Rural Challenge (California), Yampa Valley Legacy Education Initiative (Colorado), Tillamook Education Consortium (Oregon), Llano Grande Center for Research and Development (Texas), The Vermont Rural Partnership, Stewards of the High Plains (Colorado), Colorado Rural Charter Schools Network, Schleicher County Rural Challenge (Texas), Communities Creating Connections (Idaho), Yuba Watershed Alliance (California), TennGaLina (Tennessee, Georgia, North Carolina), Walden's Ridge Rural Challenge Cluster (Tennessee), Coalition of Alabamians Reforming Education (CARE), and Ventura County Rural Challenge Cluster (California).

These clusters are generally comprised of between three and twelve schools. They most often exist in close geographic proximity to one another and their organizations are very simple, often with only a project director and part-time coordinators in the participating schools. School administrators tend to be actively engaged in these clusters as are teams of teachers, students and community members. Most of these clusters have collaborating relationships with a variety of other institutions and community agencies. Further, they rely on regular interactions among the

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[18] Several of these *specific program networks*, like the *statewide networks*, existed prior to the Rural Challenge (Algebra Project, Bread Loaf, League of Professional Schools, REAL, and the National Writing Project). They had ongoing programs with various schools and communities.

[19] The Navajo Nation sites exist in Arizona and New Mexico.

[20] We do not wish to imply that funding issues don't exist for the first two groups of networks we have described. The Rural Challenge funding was essential for extending their work, for helping attract other funds, and the like. What was clear is that these first two groups had resources to begin the work while waiting for the Rural Challenge funds to arrive--there was, in some cases, a gap between notification of funding and funds actually arriving. The *small clusters* had more difficulty here as they lacked available resources related to a longer history and an institutional base with ample resources.

members, whether through face to face meetings or video and teleconferencing, and expansion of a cluster is typically determined by the group as a whole.

For the most part, these *small clusters* were organized to meet the funding requirements established by the Rural Challenge. They did not exist before the Rural Challenge. They have tended to have fairly informal structures--though in a few cases (the Colorado Charter Schools being a prime example), formal governance mechanisms have evolved. The expectation originally was that the clusters would encourage interchange beyond single schools and districts. In some cases, the interchange has gone beyond information and sharing of resources with requirements for activities to involve more than one school/school district, as in the case of the Yampa Valley Legacy Initiative, or to share information/projects with other members, as in the case of the North Coast Rural Challenge. While various cluster activities have been beneficial in supporting place-based work in the schools and communities, it is likely that individual schools and districts would have been able to do this on their own. The advantage of the *clusters*, it appears, was in expanding this work geographically and extending it in terms of its variety and depth.

Networking Tools

The *statewide* and *specific program networks* utilize a vast array of networking tools and strategies to communicate with their members. All of them hold annual conferences for educators, administrators and in some cases students and community members to meet and exchange ideas and practices. Most of these networks also hold topic specific workshops and training sessions, or sponsor public engagement meetings to highlight a local issue or concern. Summer institutes, newsletters, publications featuring relevant research, showcases of student work and school activities related to place comprise some of the networking tools that keep members informed of everything from curriculum ideas to legislation that benefits rural schools. However, technology is frequently referred to as a preferred strategy in forging links among the network members and all of the peripheral partners. Through list servers and websites to video and teleconferencing, the complexities of distance and bureaucratic structures are reduced considerably. As a consequence, there is only limited incentive for individual school districts and their communities to interact in face-to-face meetings with neighboring communities, since the services and the onsite consultations provided by the network organization are generally attuned to meet the needs of individual sites.

The *small clusters* vary as to the number of networking strategies they are able to support. The Llano Grande Center for Research and Development in South Texas is a cluster of two school districts in three communities approximately five miles apart. Nonetheless, they produce two to four major publications a year, publish newsletters, manage a website, produce videos, hold monthly meetings with cluster members and hold seminars for the community and have established a radio station--all since becoming a Rural Challenge/Rural Trust site. The Tillamook Education Consortium in Oregon, a cluster of three school districts in one county, has established a county-wide strategic planning group to define a new "vision" for the county. Importantly, the cluster has enabled the three superintendents to learn from one another and plan joint programs for teachers and students. But the various communities within the Consortium have also developed programs unique to their settings. In Tillamook, most of the information sharing is done through the frequent visits of the Project Director who has close ties to the Superintendents.

Similar to the larger networks, each of these *small clusters* also relies heavily on technology and the internet. The schools and communities in the North Coast Rural Challenge and Mariposa County in California are separated by distance and rugged geography, yet they have forged a remarkably interdependent network by utilizing video conferences to hold meetings, critique student work, and plan events.

What distinguishes these *small clusters* from their larger counterparts is that there are very few intermediate staff or bureaucratic procedures. The work of these smaller clusters is guided

by a consortium of people including educators and administrators, students, parents and community members. Collectively, steering committees or learning teams set the criteria by which individuals and schools receive Rural Challenge/Rural Trust mini-grants for specific projects, just as they plan and articulate the larger vision for the cluster as a whole.

Evolution of the Networks/Clusters

Who chooses new members? How does a network or cluster expand? The larger, *statewide networks*, in existence prior to the Rural Challenge initiative, formed their networks by starting with a few schools and communities that had a personal relationship with the leaders of these networks. In Nebraska, for example, the process began with a series of institutes hosted by the School at the Center for community members and educators. Once a number of communities embraced the philosophy and committed to the work, they helped each other move toward the goals that the School at the Center hoped could be achieved.[21]

There is no formal application process and, at this time, there is no membership fee to be a part of School at the Center. The newest cluster of schools to join School at the Center, "was already a part of an economic development network of small towns," states Miles Bryant, a School at the Center staff-member. "It has [always] been an open situation.... [I]f someone had an idea that seemed to fit [the Schools at the Center philosophy and goals], they were welcome."

PACERS began with school districts interested in participating in activities related to strengthening small rural schools. The leadership sought a diversity of schools in all regions of the state. Over time, a contract has been developed in which participating schools more formally agree to "allow teachers and students to participate in PACERS programs."

The three clusters that make up the Partnership Rural Initiative in Maine (Southern Maine Partnership, Western Maine Partnership, and the Washington County Consortium) represent 53 school districts, all of which pay annual dues to participate in their regional group. In order to comply with national Rural Challenge criteria, each partnership was initially required to select eight "genuinely rural" districts that would then form the Partnership Rural Initiative in Maine or PRIM. The Southern and Western partnerships each instituted an application process in which a review panel used a formal protocol to select the eight districts and the Washington County Consortium decided to include all of its nine districts. From the outset, PRIM committed to remain at a total of twenty-five districts for the term of the three year Rural Challenge grant before considering any expansion of the rural network.

David Ruff, PRIM Project Coordinator, commented that "prior to the Rural Challenge grant, none of the schools in the Maine Partnerships were working directly on curricula and assessment that focused on place, nor were issues of sustainability intentionally linked to academic content." Once the PRIM network schools and communities began demonstrating their work at annual conferences and writing about their programs in the quarterly Partnership publication, however, most of the Partnership schools began to incorporate some of the Rural Challenge philosophy. Consequently, according to Ruff, there may be no need to continue separating the PRIM schools from the larger Maine network. In fact, no separation is made at the annual Maine Partnership meetings.

In some instances, the networks that provide services to their collaborating schools operate under a membership fee and/or a contract. The Bread Loaf network, for example, is a natural outcome of having rural school participants in the Masters programs in English and Art, or the Continuing Education program at the Bread Loaf School of English. And, the League of Professional Schools requires a membership fee and a contract which states that 80% of the faculty must support membership in the League, that each school must form a team of six people

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[21] From the original proposal to the Annenberg Rural Challenge board of directors, 1995, prepared by Co-directors Jerry Hoffman, Paul Olson and Jim Walter.

(including the principal) to attend regular training sessions and quarterly meetings, and that the schools must be committed to spending their own resources to access other League services.

New Paradigm Partners, located in North Central Wisconsin, a small cluster of seven school districts that pre-dated the Annenberg Rural Challenge initiative, has chosen to keep its membership static. The reasons Chuck Erickson, Director of New Paradigm Partners, gives are complex, but essentially acknowledge the time that it takes for a network or cluster to work through leadership issues, mission and focus, administration and outcomes before the members are truly committed to a common vision and practice.[22]

> We basically ask that each partner demonstrate a commitment to the principles, values, goals and objectives we set for ourselves and assume responsibility for shared work. We realize schools are all going through growing pains and that there are various conflicting values and teaching strategies at work within each school, but we expect a significant (not yet defined and quantified) level of teacher and community support made visible by actions, curriculum, projects, action planning processes . . . and we expect schools to participate in collaborative activities like teacher-to-teacher sharing sessions, workshops, youth, teacher and community leadership activities, celebration-sharing sessions, action/planning/grant development work, curriculum planning, etc.
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> Schools do vary in their involvement with each activity, but we do review levels of involvement at the consortium level and discuss the progress we are making at the school/community level and challenge each other from time to time at a Board meeting.[23]

Other *small clusters*, such as the Vermont Rural Partnership, Schleicher County Rural Challenge and the Yuba Watershed Alliance, approach membership in a slightly more informal manner. The Vermont cluster has grown from an initial seven schools to ten, primarily through a mentoring process in which original members began working with interested groups of educators and students at neighboring schools. The Vermont cluster also has an active student organization that takes a leadership role in networking with students in various cluster schools. When they are close to one another geographically, students are able to meet as well as utilizing telecommunications to share information and mentor new participants.

All three of the schools in Schleicher County are part of the Rural Challenge and while they deem expanding the membership of their cluster to another school district as unrealistic, they have worked hard to expand the work by including a growing number of community members, organizations, and state agencies.[24] The Stewards of the High Plains, because of its geographic isolation in northeastern Colorado is also constrained from collaboration with other school districts, but they, too, have added new "members" to their cluster by collaborating with the Colorado Historical Society, the Denver Public Library, the National Archives and professors from Colorado University, Colorado State University, and the University of Northern Colorado. The cluster members meet once a month with representatives from these institutions to study and

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[22] The work of New Paradigm Partners, however, has been instrumental in the development of the Wisconsin Rural Challenge which is extending the ideas to larger numbers of schools and communities across the state.

[23] One of the principal values of schools entering into a cluster is the challenge they receive from others, beyond their individual schools, in this way having to rethink their practice.

[24] The Schliecher and Mariposa clusters involve several schools (three in the case of Schliecher and twelve in Mariposa) but only one superintendent. When there are multiple superintendents in a cluster, the Rural Challenge/Rural Trust vision can, it seems, be discussed and sustained more easily.

discuss diverse topics ranging from the lives of women on the plains to Native American perspectives and local ecology.[25]

It should be noted again that all the networks and clusters associated with the Rural Challenge/Rural Trust were expected to seek collaborations with various community institutions and agencies. It is, therefore, common to see collaborations with state and county historical associations, libraries, arts institutions, business and economic development agencies, state and federal forestry/natural resources/agricultural/environmental agencies, museums, senior citizen centers hospitals. These collaborations have been particularly supportive of the place-based work of schools and communities in the various networks and clusters and may go on long past the Rural Challenge/Rural Trust support.

One additional point to think about regarding growth of the clusters, is that most of the schools and districts making up the clusters were at similar places with regard to place-based work. In clusters in which one site became particularly dominant, work and interest in the other sites sometimes stalled. This might suggest the need for active support structures.

Mission and Focus

It is in the area of mission and focus that the networks and clusters tend to be the most similar, where the goals of various *statewide networks* are oftentimes the same as those of the *small clusters*. The state-wide networks became a part of the Rural Challenge because they already had a "track record" of resisting consolidation for their small schools and of supporting the practical idea that schools and communities are not separate entities.[26] Places like Houston School District in Minnesota, Howard, South Dakota and Wakefield, Nebraska, for example, had already demonstrated what could be achieved in terms of teacher motivation and student leadership by linking the work inside the schools with the needs of their local communities. The communities in Alabama that have worked with the PACERS cooperative for close to a decade can also boast of schools in which students have not only improved their academic performance, but take an active part in providing services to the community. The twenty-nine PACERS schools have a formidable network of students who know how to produce local newspapers, organize health and wellness clinics, run aquaculture businesses and put on community celebrations.

The *small clusters* have goals that are consistent with the larger *statewide* and *specific program networks*. The cross-school/community structure has allowed most of these *small clusters*, as in the case in the larger networks, as well, to tackle such things as linking place-oriented curriculum to state frameworks, explore economic development options for the community, reclaim language and cultural traditions, and assert a voice on issues of social justice and legislative reform.

Curriculum Innovation

Most of the networks and clusters are focused around curriculum innovation that relates to their local settings.[27] Currently, they are working on ways to integrate place-oriented curriculum

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[25] From Sylvia Parker's site visit field notes, October 28, 1998.

[26] It should also be noted that these *statewide networks*, as well as many of the *specific program networks*, provided the early Annenberg funding match that enabled the Rural Challenge to actually begin its work.

[27] Curriculum work that relates to place has grown enormously across the Rural Challenge/Rural Trust. We reported on much of this work in *Living and Learning in Rural Schools and Communities* (1999), *Lessons From the Field* (1999), and *The Rural Trust Assessment Monograph* (1999). Our publication, *Learning in Place* (2000), also engages curriculum in a detailed manner. It is not our intention here to do more than provide some general patterns connected to a small number of projects.

with state frameworks and content standards.[28] The core tenets of the Rural Challenge/Rural Trust philosophy have taken root in all of these networks and clusters, and they are committed to the premise that education which integrates the history, culture and social-environmental conditions of one's place encourages students and community members to address vital issues in their local settings.

The Southern Maine Partnership, one-third of the Partnership Rural Initiative in Maine, has been developing teacher networks since 1985. The emphasis in the schools which are working with Rural Challenge/Rural Trust funds has been to integrate the finely crafted curriculum units that focus on the history of Fryeburg or the waterways of Norway, for example, with the Maine Learning Results. The attention that many of these projects give to alternative assessment, including portfolios and public performance, is also in line with the new Maine standards as well as contributing to the Rural Challenge's emphasis on "real work."

This is even more evident in the Vermont Rural Partnership where the original proposal for the Vermont partnership was submitted by the Vermont Department of Education. All of Vermont's schools are required to submit portfolios of student work as part of their school-wide assessment. In the communities that are participating in Rural Challenge/Rural Trust work, not only do the teachers evaluate student work through their portfolios and their community presentations, but the community is invited to review the work as well. Given that student work is widely rooted in community history and daily life, it is only reasonable that parents and community members become a part of the assessment process. Julie Bartsch, the Rural Challenge/Rural Trust Steward for Vermont, noted:

> The state [of Vermont] like many others is focused on improving the academic performance of students,...[understanding] that a student's sense of social responsibility and personal development is directly related. What I've seen in the Vermont Rural Partnership sites is an excitement about instruction that is integrated, inquiry-based, student centered, and relates to issues of the community. Teachers are committed to designing appropriate assessments and aligning this kind of learning to the State Frameworks of Standards so it won't be marginalized.[29]

The Llano Grande Center for Research and Development in Edcouch-Elsa, Texas has taken the place-oriented curriculum to unusual heights. The leaders of the Center began their work with the premise that the predominantly Mexican-American students in the two participating school districts knew very little of the history of Mexicans in this area. Seeking to reclaim this history, students have been collecting oral histories from local residents since 1996 and the stories have been published in semi-annual journals in both English and Spanish. History, English, Spanish and art teachers at the high school and middle schools have used the Journals to inspire intense classroom discussions.

While there is much going on in relation to place-oriented curriculum, the current national emphasis on standards and testing is producing concerns. The networks and clusters are expected to be helpful here, pushing for greater recognition of the need for more local decision-making. In the spring of 1999, for example, during a networking meeting attended by Rural Trust project directors, the participants shared their experiences of trying to enlarge their place-oriented learning activities while accommodating the demands for aligning curricula to state frameworks and preparing students for various state or national tests. The Alaska Rural Challenge/Rural Systemic

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[28] The networks and clusters, because they involve multiple schools and communities and provide ongoing support, have been helpful in preventing the various state-organized standards from shutting down gains that have been made in making local places central to the curriculum.

[29] From Julie Bartsch's site visit field notes, May 19, 1998.

Initiative thought it had done well with its "Cultural Standards" but also felt that the high school qualifying exam was having a negative effect on local language work.[30] They believe that the future of indigenous languages is under serious threat. The League of Professional Schools commented on the use of ACT (American College Testing) cut-off scores for entry into the University of Georgia and the negative effect on African-Americans. PACERS shared a similar concern regarding admission to the University of Alabama. The Seaside Project in Oregon observed that it was increasingly difficult to get students and teachers engaged in community-based work when there was so much pressure to align the curriculum with the standardized tests. In spite of these concerns, project directors recognized that in this gathering of rural educators from all regions of the country, they had a rare opportunity to share with one another the kinds of programs that were producing authentic educational experiences in their schools and developing strategies to make their work much more visible to policy-makers in their various states.[31]

Meeting Community Needs

Meeting community needs through the development of young people as entrepreneurs, stimulating new jobs, and researching environmental, health, social or economic issues is an important common mission among Rural Challenge/Rural Trust projects. The intention of merging classroom content with community-based projects oriented around economic survival has been pioneered in the work of School at the Center, Center for School Change, The Program for Rural School and Community Renewal, and the PACERS Cooperative. Even before the Rural Challenge initiative, these networks were successful at getting schools to focus on the needs of their communities, and providing the training and incentives for schools to become resource partners in developing solutions for local problems.

For some schools, the REAL curriculum has provided a natural starting point, introducing students to the realities of small business development and ownership. Linking this work to formal academic content invariably inspires a renewed interest in school as well as in one's community. The school districts in Rutland, South Dakota, Crete, Nebraska and Rothsay, Minnesota have been especially productive in their efforts to rejuvenate their communities by pioneering small business enterprises.[32]

Responding to a real community need, one of the small cluster members in Tillamook, Oregon has turned part of its school into a family resource center. Inspired by a parent, a consortium of teachers, students and community members created the center in response to the needs of students. The Rural Challenge/Rural Trust Steward for Tillamook, Sylvia Parker, writes:

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[30] We should note that the development of the Alaska "Cultural Standards" is nothing short of major educational reform. Elaine Salinas, the Rural Challenge/Rural Trust Steward for Alaska, notes: "...the effort shifts the cultural and educational focus in schools from teaching about the local culture to teaching in the culture. The aim is to use indigenous knowledge systems, ways of knowing and world views as the foundation for teaching all subject matter. [The schools] employ four key pedagogical strategies: 1. Implementing oral tradition as education; 2. Reclaiming native languages through cultural immersion camps; 3. Reclaiming traditional practices of a subsistence economy; 4. Reclaiming tribal histories" (from Elaine Salinas' site visit field notes, April 14-17, 1999). The Navajo Nation's Learn in Beauty Program and the Santa Fe Indian School are working with teachers and tribal elders to design their own sets of cultural standards that they believe are important for guiding decisions about what their children should know and be able to do.

[31] From Vito Perrone, Project Directors meeting, February 1999. We should also acknowledge here the Rural Trust's policy statement on Standards and the successful interactive electronic symposium on standards and assessment organized by the Rural Trust Policy Program.

[32] REAL holds summer programs as a starting point for the work with schools and communities. These are followed up with local and regional training. South Dakota and Nebraska share a resident REAL trainer/facilitator. His presence has been important to the constructive ways REAL has developed in these states.

> The Family Resource Center is one of the most inviting, user-friendly places I've ever seen in a school. They've taken an empty classroom and made it available for everything from meeting space for community groups like Habitat for Humanity to after school homework help, to a comfortable place for parents to meet. Parents can come in and use the computer to write resumes or look for jobs on the Internet, check out games, and get free immunizations for their children.... Borrowing an idea from the Yuba Watershed Alliance [one of the California Rural Challenge/Rural Trust projects], they started a Twilight School in which free classes are offered three Thursday evenings a month to students and community members.
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> The need for this center became apparent when some research revealed that around 50 of the 220 students in the school are basically "homeless." Many are in tents, abandoned cars, or RVs not hooked up to any services, some living off the land with parents working two or three service jobs. Expecting kids to do homework or read books when there's no electricity is unrealistic. But rather than lowering the standards and expecting less from these students, the school created a place for them to get assistance with homework if they need it and access to things like computers, crafts, and lessons that they would otherwise miss out on.[33]

A great many of the community programs focus on the environment, and the networks have clearly benefited from cross-site exchanges that have occurred at the Rural Challenge annual National Rendezvous and various regional meetings. The Yampa Valley Legacy Education Initiative mapping project has found a productive alliance with the Vermont Rural Partnership, and the Llano Grande Center for Research and Development has taken advantage of the resources available in the Appalachian Rural Educational Network's video documentary program. School at the Center and the Program for Rural School and Community Renewal share, as we have noted, a REAL coordinator and their jointly hosted Student Extravaganza has become a national student gathering, a showcase of student work. Such exchange across sites and networks has accelerated greatly over the past three years.

Changing Educational Policy

Other exchanges that have characterized the annual and regional gatherings have included conversations around changing state policies, particularly with regard to pre-service teacher preparation and legislative funding formulas. School at the Center and the Center for School Change have asserted their strong advocacy for rural schools at the legislative level. One of the goals of the Center for School Change is to influence statewide and national educational policy. Supported by the strong performance of Center for School Change member schools on a variety of standardized measures, the Center staff has succeeded in persuading the legislature to slow forced school consolidation, establish the nation's first charter school certification, and allocate funds for school-based entrepreneurship. In addition, significant collaboration with the Minnesota Commissioner of Education has profoundly changed the practice of pre-service teacher education programs. Starting as a pilot program, public schools, including a number of Center members, will begin working with student teachers at the beginning of their educational programs rather than at the end.

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[33] From Sylvia Parker's site visit field notes, Nov 2-3, 1998, and May 5-6, 1999.

School at the Center is expanding its network to include an advocacy group that will begin identifying rural schools which are losing money from the state aid-to-education formula and combine forces with schools in poor, ethnic urban communities.

> What the research finds is that the two groups best affected by small-scale schooling are ethnic groups and poor communities. In Nebraska, rural places as well as ethnic neighborhoods in Omaha come under similar state funding formulas. We want to make changes in the state aid formula and changes in the distribution mechanism. Once we identify the schools that are losing money under this system, we are going to bring these school boards and those communities into a series of forums around rural education, small-scale schooling and about building coalitions engaged in policy advocacy work. It's time we begin organizing people from rural places who are as militant as the people in Omaha have been, the minority people, to insure that they get their piece of the pie.[34]

In a similar vein, the Colorado Rural Charter Schools Network is working to improve the policies that govern the certification, evaluation and management of charter schools. The Colorado Rural Charter School Network is seen as a model for other rural communities throughout the state and the nation, and every rural community in Colorado that has contemplated starting a charter school has approached this network for advice.[35]

The Colorado Rural Charter School Network has also implemented a carefully articulated program of peer review, not only in relation to school practices and student work, but to the methods of Board governance which are critical to maintaining a strong school culture. Ginny Jaramillo writes:

> In small communities, Board governance training is equal to community governance training. Sometimes the training is achieved through professional consultation and sometimes it is achieved through the harsh realities of experience. Either way it is essential to rural school and community reform.[36]

Social Justice

A mission that is common to many Rural Challenge networks is to engage the public on issues of social justice. School at the Center has been actively sponsoring public engagement meetings, most recently to confront issues around the increasing numbers of Mexican-American and Asian-American migrants settling in rural communities. In Howard, South Dakota--a member site of the Program for Rural School and Community Renewal--students have used the local farm crisis and its effects on families as a basis of ongoing interdisciplinary work.

A number of students who are part of the Appalachian Rural Education Network (AREN) have produced riveting videos that document the culture of the small Appalachian towns from the perspectives of the people who live there. Some of their videos explore sensitive racial, social, and economic issues. AREN provides these young people with superior resources--state-of-the-art instruction in video, audio, and television technology with a network of organizations all dedicated to the culture and history of the region.

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[34] From Jerry Hoffman, Co-director of School at the Center, interview, April 1, 1999.

[35] Given the volume of requests, Ginny Jaramillo, Director of the Colorado Rural Charter School Network, is writing a book on rural charter schools.

[36] From Ginny Jaramillo, Director, Colorado Rural Charter School Network, Renewal Report, 1998.

> The Appalachian Center at the University of Kentucky, Appalshop, and the Hindman Settlement School have worked with virtually every humanities scholar, writer, musician, artist, craftsperson, storyteller, theatre person, and politico involved in the transmission of the Appalachian experience from one generation to the next. If there is anything about the region that they don't know, they know who to ask.[37]

AREN is able to build on a long tradition of community organizing for social justice, beginning with resistance to unregulated strip mining which took place in Cordia in the 1960s and 1970s. "Schools in Eastern Kentucky were not usually used for such meetings, but Cordia participated primarily because of Mrs. Sloane's opposition to strip mining."[38]

Public engagement around issues of social justice are deeply embedded in the mission of the Algebra Project as well. The Algebra Project is built on the premise that access to upper level mathematics courses is synonymous with access to higher education. The Algebra Project's work is philosophically connected to issues of equality and minority rights. It forms networks within and without the school building, and Algebra Project trainers not only show teachers how to inspire young people to excel in mathematics, they also organize parents and community members to become involved as supporters of the process. The community members ultimately find themselves discussing other issues that concern them and begin working together on solutions. Moreover, the students who have formed their own networks take part in summer leadership institutes and weekly tutoring sessions of younger students; they also run after school programs.

Language and Culture

In addition to the Native networks, other networks such as the Appalachian Rural Education Network, the Llano Grande Center for Research and Development, Ventura County Rural Challenge, Walden's Ridge and the Vermont Rural Partnership are all concerned with preserving their cultural traditions and identity. At a time when the pressures are great to standardize school curricula, to see local cultures and languages as limitations and not central virtues, this work around what is local and the need for preservation is critical. By making language and culture a network/cluster issue, individual schools have received considerable moral and intellectual support.

Changing Relationships

Have the networks and clusters changed the relationships between schools and communities in ways that have profoundly altered their futures? The Rural Challenge Evaluation Program has documented literally hundreds of stories which attempt to answer this question, from the remarkable economic development initiatives generated by the Llano Grande Center for Research and Development to the revival of Rutland, South Dakota, a town of 30 people which now has a student-run convenience store. There is little question that school-community exchange has grown toward greater mutuality. This bodes well for long term development. However, it might be appropriate at this point to discuss the issue of leadership and its relationship to the long-term stability of networks.

Clearly, there are a number of Rural Challenge/Rural Trust networks that depend on the inspiration and vision of a single leader. In a number of instances, PACERS, the League of Professional Schools and School at the Center, for example, the leadership has remained steadfast over a number of years. That continuity has provided considerable stability and legitimacy at the grass roots, as well as at state governmental levels. There are also networks

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[37] From former Rural Challenge Scout Robert Gipe's site visit field notes, March 1996.
[38] Ibid.

that have struggled because of changing leadership, and the fragile link between schools and communities is occasionally broken when new leaders do not accept the old vision.

The North Coast Rural Challenge is an example of a network that came into existence because of the Rural Challenge initiative and has flourished. The four school districts are ably served by coordinators, local teachers with released time, and they have, in turn, facilitated emerging networks among students, parents, business people, teachers and elders within their own communities. There is strong evidence that within this network the Rural Challenge work has inspired community people and educators. In spite of a recent change in leadership, the network continues to grow and thrive. Lauren Sosniak, a Research and Evaluation Program Research Associate, noted:

> The North Coast sites are very different, physically, financially, economically, philosophically. You have the back-to-the-land group and the professionals who live in Mendocino, the historic capital city. Culturally they are very different. However the way the [network] is organized, there is more conversation, there is more webbing. It is not just one site coordinator going to one site bringing ideas; these sites all talk to one another. People will call up and ask each other for help. The site coordinators and the network coordinator, who is the district superintendent, hold things together [at the organizational level]. They have recently begun working with volunteer grantwriters from the local communities so they can get more money to keep the network together.[39]

The schools and communities within the networks and clusters have generally gained from the interconnections that have been established, without giving up their autonomy. This should enable the networks and clusters to add members over time or help spawn new networks and clusters of schools and communities.

By insisting on the networks and clusters, the Rural Challenge helped various schools and communities to go about their educational efforts differently, to go beyond district lines and conventions. This is an important story. In many cases in which the local school board is at the county level or seems distant from the commitments of the particular schools having a larger association, with some independent funding, has been extremely helpful.

It does not appear that networks and clusters rethink their purposes on a regular basis. In what ways are the sites gaining from being parts of networks and clusters? A real test will come as the Rural Challenge funding ends. Is the benefit of belonging to a network or a cluster perceived as critical to pursuing this work such that membership will continue beyond the funding cycle? We have heard from some national and statewide networks that their technical support capabilities to many areas is dependent on external funding. They foresee that their presence in some areas will necessarily be lessened with the end of the Rural Challenge funds. Will sites that have begun this work with the help of these networks find a continuing value for their schools and communities in the work of the Rural Challenge/Rural Trust? Only time will answer that, although current levels of engagement and enthusiasm in many schools across the country would seem to indicate that the work will continue. Whether network or cluster membership remains a high priority is something we will see in time.

Secretary of Education Richard W. Riley speaking [about] "Schools as Centers of Community," called for citizen engagement in...building smaller schools where every child can be known, for new schools that serve the entire community as multi-purpose centers, and for schools that take children into communities for real lessons rooted in real places (Rural Policy Matters, December 1999).

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[39] Lauren Sosniak, Field Associates meeting, October 1999.

Future for The Rural Challenge/Rural Trust

Finally, we turn to a question about endurance and systemic change: How have the networks and clusters inspired, facilitated or implemented the Rural Challenge/Rural Trust philosophy of systemic change and with which groups has this been the most successful? From the beginning, people realized that changing the culture of schooling, in particular linking it to local communities, was a tall order, something that would take longer than three years.

In 1996 and 1997, the story from Akula in the Alaska Rural Challenge/Rural Systemic Initiative proved that a willing group of educators, sustained by community elders, could change the way the elementary school children learned their native language and cultural traditions while at the same time learning how to use sophisticated internet technology. Three years later, with a change in school leadership, the Akula school is far less engaged with community-based programs and the elders are less involved. The vision of possibility, however, remains.

In 1997 a group of community people in Camptonville, California, high in the Sierra Nevada mountains, sought out the directors of the Rural Challenge and asked to be considered for funding. They reached out to a cluster of other tiny towns on nearby ridges, and formed the Yuba Watershed Alliance. Over the past two and a half years, community members in this cluster have developed a number of very successful evening and after-school programs, primarily taught by community members, students, parents and agency people. Twilight schools are now implemented in other Rural Challenge sites. However, it is only recently that the schools have begun to incorporate the environment and history of their region into art programs, science classes, and writing workshops and have reached out to the North Coast Rural Challenge for help in developing their own place-based curricula.

In the Vermont Rural Partnership, Stewards of the High Plains, Llano Grande Center for Research and Development, Appalachian Rural Education Network, School at the Center, the Program for School and Community Renewal and others, students have taken ownership of the Rural Challenge ideas. They have been phenomenal networkers, setting up alliances at the national rendezvous, at regional meetings and among their cluster partners. The great majority of the students in Rural Challenge schools are not ambivalent about the impact of place oriented learning in their lives. Reports continue to tell the story of students who have a better relationship with the elders in their home towns, who understand some of the economic pressures on the community and are experimenting with solutions, and students who have developed the tools to protect the environmental integrity of their locales.[40]

Finally, there is evidence that teachers have become open to the possibilities of curriculum that begins with and responds to community concerns. Many clusters have gradually begun to phase out "expert-driven" professional development programs, replacing them with opportunities for teachers, students and community people to construct original, locally organized curricula, test them, and reflect with one another on the outcomes. Many Rural Challenge teachers have come to understand that systemic change will not come from outside experts handing down a blueprint, but from the persistent readjustments and reinventions that are possible within a strong and interactive network of educators with common goals. The networks or clusters that focused on pragmatic problems and their solution--creating a six week math unit that met the state frameworks, addressed material on state tests, and related to the local place, as well as projects that culminated in the construction of a local historical museum or resulted in action to clean up local streams--fostered the sorts of community-school interactions that can ultimately result in systemic change.

Many networks and clusters have moved into a conceptual phase in which their conversations focus on the theory behind the study of place or placing the academic content at the service of job creation or environmental protection. These networks and clusters have been able

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[40] Field researchers related to the Harvard Research and Evaluation Program have noted how much the language of the Rural Challenge has taken hold, been internalized by growing numbers of students.

to move beyond discrete and unrelated professional development programs, to deeper institutional change.

Does the fact that networks and clusters are actively constructing institutional change imply that the Rural Challenge project has become a national rural school reform movement? Most of the people who have contributed to the intellectual life of the Rural Challenge believe that movements arise from the grass-roots, that without a reservoir of solid work there, national organizations will have little impact. Scott Christian, Field Associate for the Rural Challenge Research and Evaluation Program reflects on the nature of networks as follows:

> The structure of the networks determines what happens. In Bread Loaf, the network is all teachers, so they are the ones doing the work, and the work is about ideas and activities. Bread Loaf allowed a close sustained relationship with a few rural schools that they identified as Rural Challenge sites. There is an intense relationship, they collaborate a lot, they all visit each other's sites and it has influenced the larger Bread Loaf network. Laguna is a much different school because of the constant influence of Bread Loaf faculty. It allowed them to do something different.

Rural Challenge/Rural Trust sites utilize their networks/clusters differently. For some, they are seen as a means of attracting outside funding, gathering a group of teacher specialists, provide laboratory or physical education facilities and/or combining students for sports teams or theater productions. Networks and clusters also serve as a base for the exchange of ideas, curriculum and information about funding possibilities. They facilitate universities or non-profit organizations in distributing services and personnel to small schools that, alone, would not have the resources to pay for them.

At a deeper level, however, networks and clusters can actually inspire movements. But the synergy is dependent on the networking being close to the source. At the grass roots level, partners build expertise by sharing ideas and resources, seeing themselves as the experts by selectively bringing in outside services to help them do better something they are already doing well. Inevitably, a network/cluster strategy that has as its mission to effect a rural reform movement understands that it takes a long time to solidify coalitions and grow its leadership.

Conclusion

Miles Horton, founder of Highlander, states, as we noted earlier, that a social change movement requires people to be willing to take a stand for or against the system. He also recognized that it takes time for a group to learn how to act and think collectively, weighing individual self-interest against the leverage gained through a united effort. Without question, the emergence of the rural voice into governmental policy debates over curricula and standards, teacher preparation, graduation requirements, school-to-work initiatives and even charter schools has revealed that rural school districts can form natural alliances against the centralizing domination of urban school reform.

It is, perhaps, also fair to say that many of the new small clusters and networks have been "radicalized" because the Rural Challenge provided many schools and communities encouragement to alter schooling practices. There seems to be a lot of evidence that, given time, the rural networks and clusters that have experienced a great deal of success (and liberation) from this new pedagogy will continue to grow and support one another.

As the Rural Challenge makes its transition into the Rural School and Community Trust, it is re-inventing itself as a different kind of networking organization. This new organization--no longer involved with grantmaking--expects that providing support for ongoing networking of resources will prove useful to the projects which have made up the Rural Challenge. The Rural Trust will continue supporting the work of the Stewards in providing technical assistance,

coordinating regional gatherings to display student work and share ideas, convening institutes for teacher training and preparing relevant publications. It will also maintain a strong voice in the policy arena.

The question still remains as to whether a *national* network, poised to provide specific services to rural schools and communities, is likely to be seen by the Jonesport-Beal school in Maine, the Oakdale school in Tennessee, the Wessington Springs school in South Dakota, the Monte Alto school in Texas, or the Akula school in Kasigluk as being critical to their day-to-day activities. We hear repeatedly, however, that the place-oriented activities and projects generated over the past four years in nearly 700 schools and communities, have impacted school culture and community expectations. Time will tell if this impact will be deep enough to challenge the long-established industrial model of schooling; deep enough to challenge the increasing dominance of standardization.

What seems clear after three and a half years is that the landscape has changed for schools and communities participating in the Rural Challenge. Organizing around networks and clusters contributed greatly. It was the right strategy.

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Appendix

Project Summaries

(Listed alphabetically by project)

Alaska Rural Challenge/Rural Systemic Initiative

Structure
University of Alaska- Alaska Federation of Natives
3 Co-Directors
5 Regional Coordinators - Yup'ik, Inupiaq, Athabascan, Aleut/Alutiiq, Tlingit/Haida
Cultural Aides

Schools & Districts
20+ Rural Systemic Initiative school districts

Partners
National Science Foundation
Alaska Rural Systemic Initiative (5 years old)
Elders Councils

State & Local Organizations and Agencies
Alaska Department of Education
Native Fish and Wildlife Agencies
24+ organizations
Native Knowledge Network
Regional and Village Native Corporations, etc.

Institutions of Higher Education
Tribal colleges

Networking Tools
Summer language immersion/subsistence camps
Year round service camps
CD-ROM for place names
Community geneaological databases
All-site meetings twice a year
Website
Topic specific conferences
Alaska Native Knowledge Network
Elder Academies

Mission/Focus
Six initiatives rotate from region to region annually:
- Oral tradition as education
- Language/Cultural Immersion Camps
- The Subsistence Economy
- Living in Place
- Reclaiming Tribal Histories
- Alaska Native Knowledge Curriculum Unit

Alliance with Alaska Department of Education to develop a native teacher preparation certification.

The "standards for culturally-responsive schools" developed by the project have been adopted by the state of Alaska for integration with state standards. The project has also developed "guidelines for preparing culturally-responsive teachers for Alaska's schools."

Grant Criteria: Linked with Rural Systemic Initiative sites.

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Appalachian Rural Education Network (AREN) - KY, VA

Structure
University of Kentucky - Appalachian Center
AREN Steering Committee
(3 administrators, 3 teachers, 4 parent/community members, 4 non-school partners
Site-based implementation committees
1 Circuit Rider

Schools & Districts
L.F. Addington MS, Auburn HS & MS, Bland HS, Cordia School, Craig County (VA) Schools, Evarts HS, G.F. Johnson Elementary School, Ivydale Elementary School, Jenkins HS, Johnson Central HS, Johnson County MS, Jones Fork School, Letcher HS, McDowell Elementary School, Mt. Rogers Community School, Paintsville Elementary School, Powell Valley MS, Rocky Gap HS, Shelby Valley HS, South Floyd MS, St. Paul Elementary School, St. Paul High School, Stanton Elementary School, Wise County (VA) Schools.

Partners
Appalshop, Inc. (Appalachian Media Institute)
Appalachian Rural Systemic Initiative
Kentucky Science and Technology Council
Hindman Settlement School
KY Dept. of Ed. - Region 8 Service Center

National, Local & State Organizations and Agencies
Eastern Kentucky Teacher's Network (Foxfire)
Kentuckians for the Commonwealth
Forward in the Fifth
Kentucky Department of Ed. Regional Specialists
Southwest Virginia Public Education Consortium

Institutions of Higher Education
University of Kentucky
Morehead State University
Southeast Community College

ARC Alliances
Foxfire
Albemarle Learning Center
Challenge West Virginia - Lightstone
TennGaLina
Walden's Ridge Cluster

Networking Tools
Monthly school team meetings with resource groups
Spring showcases
Summer Institutes
Topic specific gatherings
Action Research/Case Studies
Website, email
Distance learning
Video documentaries
Bluegrass and traditional bands
5000 watt community radio station
Storytelling theatre company

Mission/Focus
Forge alliances with Appalachian organizations where schools can design and implement curricula that make the history and culture of Appalachia available to all public school students. Make this part of the school's approach to state mandated reform.

Utilize the resources of Appalshop to train students in issues of social justice and public engagement.

Strengthen students' pride in themselves and their community through an emphasis on Appalachian heritage, social and economic issues.

Develop work that multiplies and leverages each school's resources in collaboration with network partners.

Membership criteria: By application and invitation for schools with existing connections to AREN, members/partners are able to engage in common causes with Network members.

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Bread Loaf Alliance of Rural Educators - AK, AZ, NM

Structure
Bread Loaf School of English
- Director
- Co-Director
- Technical consultant for BreadNet

Partners
Bread Loaf Rural Teacher Network
DeWitt/Wallace Readers Digest

Rural Challenge Schools
Pojoaque High School, NM
Laguna Middle School, NM
Ketchikan High School, AK
Patagonia School District, AZ
Schoenbar Middle School, AK
Window Rock High School, AZ

Institutions of Higher Education
Middlebury College
Clemson University

National, State & Local Organizations and Agencies
State Councils of Teachers of English
National Endowment for the Humanities
Schools for a New Millennium
Write for Change

Networking Tools
Website
BreadNet internet conferences (teachers, students, administrators)
Newsletter
Alliance School meetings two times a year
Summer Institute at Middlebury College
Publications

Network Programs
Master of Arts or Master of Letters degrees
Continuing Education program
BreadNet programs
Public conferences
Private conferences
Technical support
Staff development

Mission/Focus
Rural Challenge funds bring 18 rural teachers to one of four Bread Loaf campuses for intensive summer study (up to three years) in literacy, literature, and field-based studies. These teachers receive training in telecommunications and become active members of a year-round professional development network that includes students and administrators.

Bread Loaf teachers use BreadNet, a grass-roots telecommunications network, to engage students in intensive studies of their own and other rural communities, in exchanges that range from problem-solving projects, text-based studies, shared inquiries, editing and publishing, social process drama collaboratives, and mentoring arrangements.

Bread Loaf Alliance members use the diversity of themselves, their students and their rural communities to promote critical literacy and discourage stereotypical thinking.

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Center for School Change - Minnesota

Structure
University of Minnesota
Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs
- Executive Director
- Program Associate
- 3 Full-time Outreach Coordinators in rural Minnesota
- Outside evaluators

Schools & Districts
Isanti Elementary, Miltona Science Magnet School, Discovery Elementary, Fertile-Beltrami Public Schools, Eci'Nompa Woonspe' Charter School, International Falls Elementary & Secondary, North Shore Elementary, Bridges Community School, Emily Charter School, William Kelly High School, Perham High School, Mississippi Horizons School, Warren/ Alvardo/Oslo School District, Houston High School, Hanska Community School, Goodhue Public Schools, Southwest MN Star Concept School, Janesville-Waldorf-Pemberton, Yellow Medicine East & West Public Schools, Kenyon-Wanamingo Agricultural Science & Technology Magnet School.

Partners
Higher Education Coordinating Board
Center for Reducing Rural Violence
Minnesota Rural Education Association
Larry Long Community Celebrations
U.S. Senator Paul Wellstone
Minnestoa Department of Children, Families and Learning
Minnesota Initiative Fund
P.A.C.E.R.S. - Minnesota advocacy group of students with disabilities

Funders
Annenberg Foundation
Blandin Foundation
General Mills Foundation
University of Minnesota
Minnesota Initiative Funds
Cargill Foundation
North Central Regional Education Lab

National, Local & State Organizations and Agencies
Minnesota Cooperative Extension Service
National Association of State Boards of Ed.

ARC Alliances
REAL
Foxfire
PACERS
League of Professional Schools

Networking Tools
Handbook of Guidelines for Grantees
Handbook for Site Planning and Implementation
Consortium meetings twice a year (parents, students and educators)
Annual Fall Conferences on topic-specific issues
Research and publications
Newsletters 3 times a year
Alliances with media reporters in Minnesota and in other states
Monthly columns in 30+ newspapers

Mission/Focus
The mission is a three pronged approach to working directly with schools, communities and policy leaders.
1. To produce significant improvement in student achievement.
2. To produce significant improvement in students' beliefs that they can and should improve the world.
3. To increase school and community collaborations in ways that are mutually rewarding.

Projects are all school-based, but community people must be involved. Funding is on three levels: planning, implementation, expansion to a total of $50,000.

The Center offers help increasing family involvement in schools, in motivating students to take an active involvement in their communities and in promoting the options for school choice.

Through research and publication the Center helps local and state policy makers understand what changes in education are important, what changes are being implemented and what are the implications of the work in the schools.

The Center has focused on issues including:
- Attracting and retaining good teachers
- Changing NCAA policies
- Questioning forced school consolidation
- Legislative support of school-based entrepreneurship programs.

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Colorado Rural Charter Schools Network

Structure
Project Administrator
Board of Directors

Schools
Paradox Valley
Guffey School
Marble
Crestone
Battle Rock

Partners
Colorado League of Charter Schools
Teton Science School
Utah Arts Council

Funders
Walton Family Foundation
Mobil Oil Company
U.S. Department of Education, Title X

ARC Alliances
Bread Loaf Alliance of Rural Educators

Networking Tools
Quarterly Network meetings
Peer review teams
Quarterly newsletter
Governance training workshops
Student presentations of learning

Mission/Focus
To reclaim elementary/middle schools in communities where the public schools have closed.

To learn about the local place through field research with local experts. Create a system of community mentorships.

Create displays, art shows, exhibits, performances; present these locally and to neighboring schools.

Become entrepreneurs by saving local historical sites, publishing local information, building local community resources, e.g., hockey rinks and miniature greenhouses.

One important mission is to develop systems of governance that specifically suit rural charter schools and communities.

Develop a meta-community network so that individual communities are no longer in isolation.

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Communities Creating Connections - Idaho

Structure
Project Coordinator
Board of Directors (Members from Elk City, Kooskia, School Dist. 241)
Natural Resources Education Coordinator
Artists in residence

Schools & Districts
Elk City School (K-8)
Clearwater Valley Elementary School
Clearwater Valley Middle School
Clearwater Valley High School
Joint School District #241

Partners
Upper Clearwater Arts Center
Continuing Education and Performing Arts Center
National Parks
Idaho Department of Fish and Game
Western Timber Framer's Guild
National Science Foundation

Institutions of Higher Education
University of Idaho
Lewis and Clark College

National, State & Local Organizations and Agencies
Idaho Commission of the Arts
Kooskia Revitalization Committee
Elk City Area Alliance
Potlatch Corporation
Red River Wilderness Management Area
U.S. Forest Service

Funders
Albertson Foundation

ARC Alliances
Foxfire

Networking Tools
Community meetings
Newsletter

Mission/Focus
CCC is connecting other community groups who focus on one or two issues at a time. This will help to increase collaboration in our communities to share and leverage common resources.

Place-based teaching and learning incorporates a natural resource and an art focus that builds on previous Foxfire experience.

A second focus is to work on social justice issues primarily around tribal issues and economic opportunity for this forest product-based environment.

A third focus is to take advantage of the Lewis and Clark cultural celebration which runs from 2003 to 2006.

The project actively promotes relationships with the significant population of the community that home-schools its students.

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League of Professional Schools – Georgia

Structure
Senior Director
2 Full-time Co-directors
2 Part-time Co-directors
1 Chapter in the state of Georgia (85 schools)
Chapter Congress (representatives from each school)
Practitioner Faculty (assume leadership roles)
University Fellows (on-site consultations)

Schools & Districts
One-third of League schools serve rural populations
Rural Challenge funded sites:
AirLine Elementary, Metter Elementary, Oglethorpe County Middle School, Swainsboro Primary, Brooks County Middle School, Scriven County Middle School, McIntosh County Academy

Partners
University of Georgia, College of Education
Fort Valley State University
Valdosta State University
North Georgia College
Georgia State University
Urban Compact Coalition

Funders
Lettie Pate Evans Foundation
Pittulloch Foundation
Bell South
United Parcel Service

State & Local Organizations and Agencies
Rural Development Center, Valdosta

ARC Alliances
PACERS
Southern Initiative of the Algebra Project
REAL
Bread Loaf
School at the Center

Networking Tools
Newsletters
Fall, winter, spring conferences
Topic-specific workshops
Website
Publications
Critical Friends group
List-serves
Video Conferences

Network Programs & Strategies
Annual Fee
Democratic Framework for Schools
- School Charter
- Covenant of Learning
- Action Research

Orientation workshop
Teacher training
Follow-up coaching, observation and technical support
Summer Institutes on emerging issues
Information Retrieval System
Materials development
Self-monitoring guide to implementing the Democratic Framework for Schools

Mission/Focus
In order for students to become productive citizens of a democracy, schools must themselves become democratic institutions, they must focus democratic decision-making on student learning and they must evaluate whether their decisions and actions are actually helping students learn. The tools to this process are:

1. Developing a school charter or constitution,
2. A covenant which guides the school priorities regarding curriculum, instruction, assessment, professional development, scheduling, and resource allocation (determined by democratic process),
3. Conducting research by which schools study the effects of their academic programs on student learning.

An additional focus is policy work which has resulted in formal position papers, testimony at state legislative hearings, and rural roundtables. Some of the issues covered include equity, demonstrations of student learning, and multiple-level network relationships.

Rural Challenge funded sites were given small curriculum development grants.

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Llano Grande Center for Research & Development - Texas

Structure
Superintendent of Edcouch Elsa School District
Project Director
Researcher and Archivist
Office Manager
Student Assistants
Rural Challenge Advisory Council

Schools & Districts
Edcouch Elsa School District
LaVilla School District

Partners
The Delta Cluster (MIRA) - (Edinburg, San Carlos, Monte Alto)
Telesurvey Research Associates (DataTraq Data Collection Center)
Edcouch, Elsa, LaVilla Chamber of Commerce
City of Elsa

State & Local Organizations and Agencies
Boys and Girls Clubs
2 adult day care centers
Rio Grande Valley Empowerment Zone
Texas Historical Commission
The King Ranch
Hidalgo County Historical Museum

Institutions of Higher Education
University of Texas, Pan American
South Texas Community College
Texas A & M, Kingsville
Southwest Texas State University

Funders
Kellogg Foundation
Houston Endowment

Networking Tools
Website
Managing Information in Rural America (MIRA) cluster meetings
Semi-annual publications
Newsletters
CDs of oral interviews and historical photographs
Videos
Media engagement
School radio station - 89.7
Alumni list server
Llano Grande Center Seminar Series
La Villa Art Gallery

Mission/Focus
The mission is to reclaim the history of the predominantly Mexican-American families and communities in the South Texas delta area through community/school cooperative learning experiences.

A three part systemic reform strategy has been implemented:

1. Train teachers in place-based pedagogy, relational teaching approaches, pre-college advising, innovative assessment tools and collaborations with parents.
2. Integrate students into all facets of school policy: curriculum reform, community asset surveying, writing and publishing, and strategic planning.
3. Build on research by students and educators to revitalize the economies of the region.

The primary vehicle for community development and curricular reform is the oral history and photo archive retrieval. Parents are brought into the school as part of the instructional process through the study of their stories. A school-based publishing facility that produces books and textbooks has been created.

Another vehicle is a network with students who have graduated and are attending college. Students are kept informed of summer and full-time employment opportunities made possible by the Center's community partnerships.

A long-term mission is to establish an endowment that will make summer fellowships and research positions available to Llano Grande graduates as well as attract outside educators and artists to participate in year-long residencies.

Contact Information
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Mariposa County Schools - California

Structure
District Superintendent
Project Director
District Curriculum Coordinator
District Coordinator
Part-time Site Coordinators (teachers and community members)
Steering Committee (agency staff, community members, students, educators)

Schools & Districts
Catheys Valley School, Coulterville-Greely Elementary School, El Portal Elementary School, Jessie B. Fremont Community School, Lake Don Pedro Elementary School, Mariposa Elemementary School, Middle and County High School, Spring Hill High School, Woodland Elementary School, Yosemite Elementary and High School

Partners
K-12 Alliance for Science and Mathematics
Mariposa Visioning Committee
Mariposa County Rural Challenge mobile research lab
Sierra Telephone
Mariposa County Fire Department
Mariposa County Health Department
Mariposa County Parks and Recreation
Mariposa American Indian Council
Mariposa County Visitors Bureau
Mariposa County Schools Foundation
Mariposa County Farm Advisory
Mariposa County Public Utilities
Mariposa County Public Works
Mariposa County Board of Supervisors
Mariposa Firesafe Council
Mariposa Chamber of Commerce
Mother Lode Job Training

Institutions of Higher Education
Fresno Pacific College
University of California, Merced

National, State & Local Organizations and Agencies
National Park Service (Yosemite)
U.S. Forest Service
U.S. Department of Forestry and Fire
Yosemite Institute
Yosemite Association
Resource Conservation District
Bureau of Land Management

Networking Tools
Teleconferences
One-week Summer Institute
Visioning community meetings
Website
Newsletters
Steering Sub-committees:
Grants, Finance, Publicity

Mission/Focus
The highest priority is to find a variety of ways to connect students to the community and, by doing so, engender responsibility for protecting the surrounding environment.

Marisposa County Schools collaborate with the K-12 Math and Science alliance to develop place-based curricula that meet the State Frameworks. Programs are linked to state programs and mandates so the work quickly becomes institutionalized.

The steering committee generates a list of potential projects that meet community needs or draw on community resources. This committee will be responsible for sustaining the work in the future.

Classroom teachers, community agencies, and the network itself seek to develop sophisticated technology programs that help them share information and work.

Contact Information
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Navajo Nation – Learn In Beauty (LIB) – AZ, NM

Structure

Division of Diné Education
- Division Director
- LIB Coordinator
- Navajo Nation Rural Systemic Initiative Principal Investigator
- LIB Advisory Committee
- 8 school coordinators

Schools & Districts

Little Singer Community School
Rock Point Community School
Ganado Primary School
Chinle Primary School
Tuba City High School
Fort Defiance Elementary School
Newcomb Elementary School (NM)
Shiprock Alternative School (NM)

Partners

Navajo North Central Association
Navajo Nation Head Start
Navajo Education Technology Consortium
Division of Diné Education
Rural Systemic Initiative (RSI)

Institutions of Higher Education

Northern Arizona University, Teacher Education Program
Diné College - Tsaile, Shiprock, Tuba City, Window Rock

Local Organizations

Community Wellness Center (Little Singer)
Navajo Nation Education Committee
Navajo Nation Council
Navajo Chapter Houses
Navajo Nation Museum and Library

Networking Tools

Community gatherings
Quarterly newsletters
Website
Summer Institute
Materials clearinghouse
National Native Conferences
Advisory council meetings in conjunction with RSI

Mission/Focus

The focus of Learn in Beauty is to collaborate with RSI to create a comprehensive model for the transformation of Navajo education using Diné language and culture as a base.

One focus with Northern Arizona University is to provide Masters level courses to Navajo speaking teachers.

Diné Education Programs are oriented to developing culturally relevant performance standards to complement Arizona State Standards, developing a Navajo Language Assessment Instrument, and developing K-12 Navajo cultural materials, specifically a science/math curriculum.

Contact Information

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Navajo Nation
Division of Diné Education
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Window Rock, AZ 86515
520-871-7790

New Paradigm Partners Consortium - Wisconsin

Structure
Coordinator
New Paradigm Partner Consortium Board of Directors
(One Facilitator from each school/community)
Local Learning Teams
Facilitator in each school district
Membership from school, community, business

Schools & Districts
Birchwood, Bruce, Chetek, Turtle Lake, Flambeau, Shell Lake, Lac Courte Oreilles Ojibway, Weyerhauser, Lake Holcombe, Winter, Mount Senario College

Institutions of Higher Education
Stanford University, Research
University of Wisconsin-Madison, Department of Education
University of Wisconsin-River Falls, Rural Development Center
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education

National, State & Local Organizations and Agencies
National Association for Community Education
Highlander Center
Rusk County Youth Development Council
Educational Services Agencies
Wisconsin Vocational Technical College

Funders
Bureau of Indian Affairs
3M Company
Institute for Responsive Education
Kellogg Foundation

ARC Alliances
REAL
Llano Grande Center for Research
Larry Long Community Celebrations
Wisconsin Rural Challenge

Networking Tools
Monthly meetings of Consortium Learning Team
Annual Summer Conference
Quarterly newsletter
Website

Mission/Focus
Based on the philosophy and practices of the Community Education Movement.

Programs focused in these areas:
- Service learning and technology projects in communities
- Entrepreneurship education
- Community celebrations and festivals
- Community media/Youth Press

Schools and community teams decide on a particular project to be undertaken, in line with the areas above.

Contact Information
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New Paradigm Partners/Rural Challenge Project
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North Coast Rural Challenge – California

Structure
Director (Superintendent at Mendocino)
Network Committee (coordinators, students, community members)
4 District Coordinators
Local coordinating committees

Schools & Districts
Point Arena
Laytonville
Anderson Valley
Mendocino

Institutions of Higher Education
College of Redwoods
Mendocino College
Chico State California University (Evaluation)
Stanford University (Complex Instruction Project)

Partners
Center for Ecoliteracy
Fort Ross Global Village (local archaeological studies linked with students in California, Russia and Alaska)

State & Local Organizations and Agencies
State Parks
Redwood Coast Medical Services
Action Network – Coalition of community service organizations
South Coast Senior Center
Harwood Lumber Company
Moat Creek Managing Agency

Funders
Kellogg Foundation – Managing Information in Rural America (MIRA) grant

Networking Tools
Video conferences
Teleconferences
Website
Annual Summer Gathering
Local Internet Service provider
Cross-site trainings

Mission/Focus
The intention is to support cross-site collaboration on projects, most of which are involved with water resources. Projects range from oral histories to bilingual literacy training to vermiculture.

Districts collaborate on curriculum, reflective writings, discussions and assessment criteria.

Technology plays a major role with students involved in creating websites and hosting public forums for technology providers working with the community. The internet is seen as a way of extending their isolated communities.

Grantee criteria: For projects, a formal grant application is submitted to the Steering Committee which includes project goals, people involved, sponsors, length of time and number of people affected.

Contact Information
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PACERS Small School Cooperative - Alabama

Structure
University of Alabama: Program for Rural Services and Research
PACERS administrative staff
Technical Consultants or Program Coordinators
Cluster (regional) Coordinators 1 per year

Schools & Districts
29 schools in 5 clusters (Southwest, Northeast, East Central, Northwest, Southeast)

Partners
Alabama State Department of Education
Alabama Coalition for Excellence in Small Schools (ACCESS)
Stillman College (newspapers)
Freshwater Institute/Conservation Fund

Funders
Ford Foundation
Lyndhurst Foundation
State Department of Education
Appalachian Regional Commission
University of Alabama

State & Local Organizations and Agencies
Birmingham Times
Alabama Press Association
Freshwater Institute
Alabama State Department of Education

Alliances with ARC
REAL
TennGaLina Consortium
Larry Long Community Celebrations
Foxfire

Networking Tools
Cluster meetings once a year
Annual Conference
Strategic planning sessions
PACERS email
Website
Project workshops
School/community meetings

Network Programs
Formal Agreements of Cooperation
Aquaculture projects
Bookshows
Drama projects
Greenhouses
Health Inventory
House Construction
Celebrations of Community and Place
Community Newspapers
School/Community Park project
Photography project/Community Visual Documentation
Print Shop
Rural Skills Development project
School Store and school-based enterprises
Video documentaries
Web-based Instruction
Entrepreneurial Education
ESL/Hispanic Programs

Mission/Focus
The work supports the long-term viability of local communities and small rural public schools.

The work helps students develop academic and life skills. Their work must pass the test of professional evaluation and community judgment.

The Cooperative is intent on celebrating rural communities and making them happier places to live and work.

Contact Information
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Program for Rural Services and Research
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Partnership Rural Initiative in Maine

Southern Maine Partnership

Structure
- Executive Director
- Project Directors
- Circuit Rider
- Southern Maine Partnership Advisory Council (teachers, superintendents, principals and University of Southern Maine representative)
- Superintendents' Group (superintendents and university deans)

Partners
- 28 school districts, 3 private schools
- University of Southern Maine
- Maine College of Art
- Southern Maine Technical College

Western Maine Partnership

Structure
- Executive Director
- Facilitators
- Regional Coordinator
- Task Forces
- Steering Committee (3 superintendents; Dean of Education, University of Maine at Farmington)
- Leadership Team (school and University of Maine at Farmington teachers and administrators, parents)

Partners
- 29 school districts
- University of Maine at Farmington
- Western Mountain Heritage Inc.
- Western Maine Math-Science Alliance
- Western Maine Support Network
- Maine Principals' Association
- Center for Inquiry in Secondary Education

Washington County Consortium

Structure
- Executive Director
- Facilitators
- Board of Directors (superintendents and University of Maine at Machias representative)
- Leadership Team (school, university faculty, administrators, community members, students)

Partners
- 11 school districts
- University of Maine at Machias
- Sunrise County Economic Council

State & Local Organizations and Agencies

Maine Economic Development Council
Local businesses and associations including: Sappi Pulp and Paper (Skowhegan), Peacock Canning (Lubec), Connors Aquaculture (Eastport), Lake Environment Association (Bridgeton), Fryeburg Historical Society

ARC Alliances

League of Professional Schools
Vermont Rural Challenge Partnership
Teaming with Nature (Selborne Project)

Networking Tools

Annual all-site conference
Executive director and circuit rider meetings
Assessment workshops
On-site consultations
Visitations between schools
Newsletters and calendars of events
Website
Distance learning
Electronic Learning Marketplace (curriculum on the internet)
Critical Friends groups
Dine and Discuss
Superintendents' group and seminar series
Teacher and leadership groups and seminars

Mission/Focus

PRIM mission has been organized around four goals:
- curricula of place as developed through grant funding will be connected to the Maine Learning Results.
- all curriculum will have corresponding assessments in place which clearly assess student achievement in terms of the Maine Learning Results. Where appropriate, these assessments can and will be used to support the comprehensive assessment system.
- the work will be embedded in district work.
- participants (teachers, students, community members, administrators) will reveal an appreciation of pride, value and stewardship of place.

Membership Criteria: Annual dues. PRIM sites are in genuinely rural settings; they followed a tuning protocol to determine readiness to undertake mission. The sites committed to work together for 3 years. Rural Challenge philosophy has now spread across all sites in all three partnerships.

Contact Information

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Program for Rural School and Community Renewal - South Dakota

Structure
South Dakota State University
College of Education
Leadership Group
Dean, College of Education
3 Faculty, College of Education
3 school people
Staff Assistant – Field researcher
2 Consultants – Black Hills Co-op
Program for Rural School and Community Renewal Advisory Board

Schools & Districts
Belle Fourche, Clear Lake, Frederick, Willow Lake, Spearfish, Wessington Springs, Pollock, Rutland, Volga, Howard, Selby, BASEC, Estelline, Flandreau, Henry

Partners
Black Hills Special Services Cooperative

Funders
Kellogg Foundation (1994)

National, State & Local Organizations and Agencies
State Department of Education
State School Board Association
State Education Association
State School Administrators' Association
Chadron Institute
The Land Institute

ARC Alliances
REAL
School at the Center (Nebraska)
Larry Long Community Celebrations

Networking Tools
Public Engagement meetings twice a year
Student Extravaganza
Annual Conference
State-wide teacher conference
Website
Internet list serve
Video
Newsletter

Mission/Focus
RSCR criteria for school reform includes discernable curricula that utilizes the local place to get at issues of survivability for the community. Funded projects have to be linked with actual community needs.

Membership Criteria: Fully funded Implementation Sites were originally rated against 7-8 criteria that judged the willingness of the school district to commit people and resources to working with the community, and link that effort to the school curriculum. Currently, original sites mentor new sites to become partners. New applications are only accepted from committees which include school and community members.

Contact Information
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Project Albemarle Learning Center – North Carolina

Structure
Executive Director
Assistant Director

Schools & Districts
Chowan Middle School
Perquimans County Middle School
Gates County Middle School

Partners
Chowan County Manager
North Carolina Rural Economic Development Center
National Science Foundation grant for Gates, Camden and Washington County schools

State & Local Organizations and Agencies
LEARN North Carolina – sharing curricular lessons via internet

Networking Tools
Topic-specific workshops
Internet connections

Network Programs
Agricultural research
Rural Life museum

Mission/Focus
The ALC is a laboratory where school and community members design curricula that focus on the economic and social challenges in Albemarle County, North Carolina, i.e., race relations, strengthening economic opportunities, preserving the natural resources of Albemarle Sound.

Contact Information
Project ALC (NC)
Jake Boyce, Executive Director
Bob Harrell, Assistant Director
Resources for Educational Systems & Associates
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Santa Fe Indian School – Circles of Wisdom –NM

Structure

Santa Fe Indian School Superintendent
Planning and Evaluation Director
- Circles of Wisdom Coordinator
- Senior Researcher
- Research Interns
- Curriculum Specialist
- Community Liaison
- Administrative Assistant
- Student Interns

Schools

Taos, Ohkay Owingeh, Santa Clara, Tesuque, San Ildefonso, San Felipe, Zia, Jemez, Acoma, Laguna, Isleta, Cochiti, Zuni, Santa Fe Indian School

SFIS Partners

Community-Based Education Model (CBEM)
School to Work
Youth Leadership
Academics
Student Living

Partners Outside of SFIS

19 New Mexico Pueblos
Coalition of Educators of Native American Children (CENAC)
Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA)
Agencies & schools serving Pueblo children
Public schools serving Pueblo children
Private schools serving Pueblo children
Utah, Colorado, Arizona, New Mexico Rural Systemic Initiative (UCAN/RSI)
New Mexico Tribal Coalition
Woodrow Wilson Foundation
State-Tribal Coalition

Networking Tools

Meetings with individual Pueblo Governors
School Rallies twice a year
Pueblo-initiated projects that encourage community-based education
School-initiated projects that encourage community-based education
School transition forums and meetings
Student-facilitated community meetings
Student-facilitated student meetings
Pueblo Youth Leadership meetings, summits and institutes
Research documenting the process behind Circles of Wisdom
Career Days
Newsletters
Focus Groups
Meetings with SFIS Partners
Meetings with Partners outside of SFIS
Professional Development: technology training, standards-based education, curriculum refining and writing

Mission/Focus

Circles of Wisdom's vision is to have a Pueblo educational system supported by curriculum that is driven by community priorities.

To accomplish this, the five pieces of the program – research, technology, youth leadership, curriculum development and professional development – must come together in community-school partnerships that honor the intricacy of the Pueblo protocol.

The end result will be the documentation of a successful process for working with Pueblo communities, access to technology as a means for strengthening Pueblo communities, and culturally appropriate, interdisciplinary curricula that are aligned with New Mexico state standards and the needs of Pueblo youth.

Contact Information

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Schleicher County Rural Challenge - Texas

Structure
Superintendent
Project Director
Management Board (community members, teachers, students)

Schools & Districts
Schleicher County Independent School District

Partners
Eldorado Chamber of Commerce
Eldorado Economic Development Corporation
Educational Service Center, Region 15 (technology)
West Texas Utilities
Nuevos Amigos (service learning)

Institutions of Higher Education
San Angelo State University

National, State & Local Organizations and Agencies
Texas Agricultural Cooperative Extension Service
4-H
Job Training Program Act
Texas Historical Commission
Eldorado Woolen Mill
Regional Small Business Development Center
X Bar Ranch
Head Start
Schleicher County Historical Society
Schleicher County Game Association

ARC Alliances
REAL

Networking Tools
Internet and email
Website
Video production
Distance learning
Quarterly newsletters
Event planning
Business internships/job shadowing
Summer Institute
Mini-grant projects

Mission/Focus
The primary vehicle for accomplishing the mission is school/community based learning that demonstrates to students the value of education in local/economic terms. The program is focused primarily on turning the school into an engine for economic revitalization by linking natural features of the county to tourist and small business development.

The school district will maintain high TAAS scores within a student population that has an increasing number of Hispanic students.

Computer and television technology-assisted instruction is being developed to expand students' access to a greater variety of learning experiences that the schools are not able to offer, and to provide student assistance to local businesses seeking to expand their markets.

Contact Information
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Schleicher County ISD
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School at the Center - Nebraska

Structure
Self-directed local teams (organized around function)
Local focus groups (organized around issues, inclusive)
4 Regional Coordinators
Administrative Staff based at Teachers College, University of Nebraska-Lincoln

Schools & Districts
Northeast Cluster
(Wakefield, Wayne, Walthill, Cedar Bluffs)
Central Cluster
(Henderson/Heartland, Albion, Silver Creek, Palmer, Ord, Petersburg)
Western Cluster
(So. Platte, Hay Springs, Morrill, Ogallala, Valentine, Arthur, Potter Dix, Wallace, Tryon)
Southeast Cluster
(Crete, Nebraska City, Nemaha Valley, Syracuse, SE Consolidated)

Partners
University of Nebraska: College of Arts and Science, Love Library, Center for Rural Revitalization
Nebraska Community Foundation (fiscal agent)
Educational Service Unit system (ESU)
Nebraska Department of Education
Nebraska Alliance for Rural Education (legislative lobby)
Five Rivers Resource Conservation & Development District
Audubon Society

State & Local Organizations and Agencies
State Department of Economic Development
Nebraska Rural Development Commission
Nebraska Humanities Council
Nebraska State Historical Society
Nebraska State School Boards Association
Nebraska State Education Association
Nebraska Association of School Administrators
Game and Parks Commission
Nebraska Math/Science Coalition (Nebraska's RSI)
Coordinating Commission for Postsecondary Education
Excellence in Education Council

Institutions of Higher Education
Wayne State College
Chadron State College

ARC Alliances
Foxfire
Nebraska Rural Writing Project
REAL
Rural School and Community Renewal (SD)
Larry Long Community Celebrations
PACERS (Alabama)

Networking Tools
Fall conference on math/science/social sciences
Spring Humanities conference
Summer Institutes
Winter seminar on community/school leadership
Youth Extravaganza
Quarterly Cluster meetings
Publication Series, "From Our Own Earth"
Videotape, "Making Waves"
Pamphlets on rural education and community building
Presentations at state conferences, local civic and community organizations
Policy analysis papers

Mission/Focus
To develop a sense of heritage, history and culture; to attend to the infrastructure and economy of small communities; to use technology to connect town and school; to use science and math to solve local problems; to increase the opportunities for students to tackle social justice issues.

Alliance with Educational Service Unit system is focused on making community-based education legitimate within the context of state-wide standards of learning and accreditation.

Legislative and policy advocacy and coalition building centered on equity of school funding, equal educational opportunities, adequacy of educational offerings, small school accreditation, deconsolidation and social justice issues.

Pre-service teacher preparation for using the community circumstances as a way of enhancing the practice of teaching in rural places.

Membership Criteria: Potential sites (rural communities and schools) come through contacts with University of Nebraska agriculture advocacy groups, rural education advocacy groups, cultural organizations, natural resource groups, and/or economic development agencies. Interested partners engage in a School at the Center planning institute and gain support for their work by clustering with other community-school partners.

Contact Information
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Center for Curriculum and Instruction
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lwalter1@unl.edu

The Southern Initiative of the Algebra Project - AL, AR, GA, LA, MS, NC, SC

Structure
Local Algebra Project Trainers
12 Parent/Youth community development coordinators
Mathematics educator leaders
Student leaders
Regional Coordinators in each state
National Algebra Project Trainers

Schools & Districts
Middle schools in Mississippi Delta (27 schools)
North Carolina (5 schools)
South Carolina (5 schools)
Alabama (6 schools)
Louisiana (5 schools)
Arkansas (3 schools)
Georgia (2 schools)

Partners
Positive Innovations, Inc.
The Algebra Project, Inc.
Young Peoples Project, Inc.
Soros Foundation

Funders
Annie E. Casey Foundation
Soros Foundation
Herron Foundation
Walton Family Foundation
National Science Foundation

Institutions of Higher Education
Lesley College, MA (evaluator)
Jackson State University, MS
Mississippi Valley State University, MS
Tougaloo College, MS
University of Arkansas Pine Bluff, AR
North Carolina Central University
Xavier University, LA
Fayetteville State University, NC

Networking Tools
Monthly community meetings
Semi-annual regional meetings
Math Competitions
Website
Video documentation

Network Programs
3-stage training program for teachers
Young Peoples Project - after school tutoring
Youth Leadership Camp
Summer Youth training institutes
Summer Adult training institutes
Monthly workshops for parents and youth
National Youth Summit
Collaboration with HBCU

Mission/Focus
Primary objective is to have every student in the project complete the college preparatory mathematics curriculum in high school. To that end all Algebra Project students are expected to complete algebra by the 8th or 9th grade.

The Youth Initiative of the Southern Initiative provides the target population with training and experience in implementing Algebra Project programs after school and during summer institutes.

The Algebra Project requires that each community form a Community Team made up of parents, students, teachers and administrators. A community-based organization has a better chance to sustain the effort of school reform over the long-term than one made entirely of school personnel.

Contact Information
David Dennis & Carolyn Dennis (Co-Directors)
Positive Innovations, Inc.
The Southern Initiative of the Algebra Project
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ddennissr@aol.com

Stewards of the High Plains - Colorado

Structure
Project Co-Directors
Local site coordinators
Local steering committees

Schools & Districts
Idalia
Julesburg
Fleming

Partners
Future Business Leaders of America
Assisted Living Center (Idalia)
Northeast Colorado Welcome Center
Sedgwick County Commission on Aging
Idalia Visions

Institutions of Higher Education
Colorado University
Colorado State University
University of Northern Colorado
Morgan Community College
Ehime University - Japan
Trinidad Community College

National, State & Local Organizations and Agencies
Rural Development Council
Colorado Historical Society
Denver Public Library
National Archives
The Nature Conservancy
Colorado State Parks
Colorado Division of Wildlife
Wray Museum
Colorado Council for the Arts
Colorado Department of Education - Environment
Young Women Farmers

Funders
National Endowment for the Humanities
Colorado Department of Transportation
Charles V. Brandon
Great Outdoors Colorado (GOCO)
Kitzmiller-Bayles Trust
Yuma County Commissioners

ARC Alliances
Bread Loaf School of English
Foxfire

Networking Tools
School Board/Town Board monthly meetings
Monthly cluster meetings
Special topic workshops
Newsletter
Interactive website

Mission/Focus
Students are at the center of this work designing, planning and carrying out projects that deal with:

Rural Issues:
how to create sustainable economic development;
how to absorb the impact of rural growth industries (e.g., prisons, corporate farms, retired farmers).

Academic Issues:
how to integrate community and schools in joint learning;
how to put local customs and resources into a practical learning curriculum.

Contact Information
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Teaming with Nature (Selborne Project) – NY, PA

Structure
Roger Tory Peterson Institute of Natural History
  Education Director
  Project Coordinator
Rural Challenge/Selborne Community
Advisory Committee
Steering Committee (District Coordinators)

Schools & Districts
Chautauqua Lake Central School District (NY)
Falconer Central School District (NY)
Jamestown Public School District (NY)
Randolph Academy Union Free School (NY)
Warren County School District (PA)
Kane Area Central School (PA)

Institutions of Higher Education
Edinboro University, Department of Education
State University of New York at Fredonia
Pennsylvania State University/Oregon State
  University, College of Education (evaluation)

State & Local Organizations and Agencies
Board of Cooperative Educational Services (NY)
New York Department of Environmental Conservation
Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection

Networking Tools
Consultations
On-site support 4 times a year
Roger Tory Peterson Institute Quarterly publication
Annual regional conference
Demonstration sites
Pre-service sites for student teachers
Website
Monthly steering committee minutes

Network Programs
Summer Renewal Institutes
Nature Education programs

Mission/Focus
In studying a square kilometer around their schools, students focus on place, using the community as a curricular lens. First, students learn directly about the ecosystems and diversity of life inhabiting their square kilometer. Second, students come to value their home town and to appreciate the cooperation and shared responsibility that are necessary to sustain it.

Teachers create curriculum materials for the study of natural science which the Peterson Institute makes available to other public schools.

Original cluster members model their programs to new groups of Selborne teachers at annual Summer Institutes.

Contact Information
Selborne Project (NY, PA)
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TennGaLina Consortium (Tennessee, Georgia, North Carolina)

Structure
Project Coordinator (half-time position)

Schools & Districts
Hiwassee Dam, NC
Copper Basin, GA
Van Buren, TN
Woody Gap, GA
Ducktown, TN

Partners
Green-Gold Conservancy
Tennesee Wildlife Resource Agency
Cherokee National Forest Service
Southeast Tennessee Resource and Conservation District Council
Boy Scouts of America
Whitewater Center

Institutions of Higher Education
Institute at Mars Hill College
Strom Thurmond Institute of Clemson University (evaluation)
Tri-County Technical College
Tennessee Technological University

ARC Alliances
Larry Long Community Celebrations
Walden's Ridge Rural Challenge Cluster, TN

Networking Tools
Internet list server
Monthly Consortium meetings
Annual retreat
Summer Institute
Teacher-student exchanges among schools
Mini-newsletter
Inter-school electronic communication (using Walden's Ridge model)

Mission/Focus
Faculty at Mars Hill College and Tennessee Tech work with TennGaLina teachers on a two part process. First, they convert the standards for each content area into a generic formula which meets the guidelines in their state. Second, using these guidelines, the teachers are trained to develop curricula that utilize local and regional resources, history and issues.

The youth in these schools embrace a strong emphasis on entrepreneurship that encourages them to develop the skills necessary for work in their communities, specifically with natural resources.

Schools integrate hands-on arts activities (broadly defined) in all disciplines that relate to the history, geography, architecture, horticulture, crafts, etc. of the individual communities. The short-term goal is to give students a better appreciation of art, and the long-term goal is to give them an appreciation of how art is a large part of the heritage in the country, the mountains, the rural lifestyle.

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Tillamook Education Consortium - Oregon

Structure
4 Superintendents, 1 Principal, 1 College President
Project coordinator
Community Volunteer Coordinator

Schools & Districts
Nestucca Valley School District
Neah-Kah-Nie School District
Tillamook School District
NW Regional Educational Service District
Neskowin Valley School
Tillamook Community College

Partners
Oregon Department of Education
Portland State University (teacher internships)
Tillamook Education Service District
Management and Training Corporation
Tillamook County Creamery Association - Summer Agriculture Institute

National, State & Local Organizations and Agencies
Oregon Department of Forestry
U.S. Fish and Wildlife
National Estuary Project
Department of Environmental Quality
Rural Education Corps/Oregon Youth Conservation Corps
Soil and Water Conservation District
Chambers of Commerce
Mobler Store
Ortiz Signs

ARC Alliances
Seaside

Networking Tools
Community Forums
Strategic planning groups
Newsletter
Tillamook County Teacher Internships
Staff Development workshops

Mission/Focus
The Consortium was created to build stronger ties between the three districts and their partners, and to create a community-based learning system that causes students, parents, businesses and staff to realize their place in the unique, rural community of Tillamook County.

This mission is accomplished through the Tillamook Options Program which enrolls 155 students in various programs including:
- Alternative Education High School
- Oregon Youth Conservation Corps - Rural Education Corps
- Teen Parent Program
- High School Credit Recovery
- Lunch Buddy Program
- After-School Enrichment Program
- COWS (Creating Opportunities with Students)
- Heritage Project
- Family & Community Resource Center (Neah-Kah-Nie School District and parents)
- Tillamook Forest Education Project

Contact Information
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Ventura County Rural Challenge - California

Structure
Program Coordinator
3 Community liaisons
Leadership group
Program consultants (YAC, LUPE, Peaceable Schools, Film/video)

Schools & Districts
Ojai School District
Ocean View School District
Fillmore School District
Santa Paula Elementary School

Partners
Ojai Valley Youth Foundation
Ojai Valley Museum
Latinos Unidos Pro Educacion (LUPE)
Educators for Social Responsibility – Peaceable Schools
Youth and Adults for Community

State & Local Organizations and Agencies
Ventura County Arts Council
Associates Insectary
Santa Paula Union Oil Museum
California Historical Society

Institutions of Higher Education
Oxnard Community College

Networking Tools
Newsletter
Simultaneous Translation Services
Summer conference
Special topic workshops

Mission/Focus
The mission of this group is to use the community asset identification process to identify strategies where schools can help the community deal with inter-ethnic conflict which has affected the schools' ability to provide quality education for all students.

To accomplish this mission, youth/adult teams in each community meet regularly to discuss youth-related community issues including environmental issues (pesticide use), recreation, health and academic achievement. Students are learning conflict resolution through the Peaceable Schools program.

The group supports and is supported by a newly formed Latino Parents Organization (LUPE) which keeps Spanish-speaking parents informed about what their children are doing in school and helps them speak out about environmental issues in agricultural work. They are providing simultaneous translations at community meetings to encourage more involvement.

A coalition of Latino parents, students, filmmakers, and community adults are involved in working with local museums and arts organizations to identify and record the contributions made by people from different cultures to the development of the county. This work has featured the arts and culture of Mexican Americans, and the contributions to the farming economy of early Chinese workers.

Contact Information
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The Vermont Rural Partnership

Structure
Governance Board of 15 members (partners, community members, students, site leaders)
Project Director (part-time)
Americorps Promise Fellow

Schools & Districts
18 Schools
3 K-12
1 K-4
5 K-6
9 K-8

Institutions of Higher Education
John Dewey Project at the University of Vermont

State & Local Organizations and Agencies
Local Teams in each site (18)
Rural Partnership Youth Alliance

Partners
Vermont Community Foundation
AD Henderson Foundation
Vermont Leadership Center
Snelling Center for Government at the University of Vermont
Food Works (Common Roots Curriculum)
Community Works Journal
Service Learning Demonstration Sites in VT

ARC Alliances
Bread Loaf Alliance of Rural Educators
REAL (Mini, Middle, High School)

Networking Tools
Community Assets Survey
Search Institute Survey, Grades 6-12
John Dewey Case Study Evaluation
Newsletter
Electronic network
Website (in progress)
Mentoring Groups (cluster of 3 schools)
Small Schools Conferences (annually in May)
Fall Retreat (annual 2 day - all sites)
Governance Board Meetings
Rubrics for 4 goal areas

Mission/Focus
To develop a curriculum of place -- a locally developed curriculum tied to Vermont s Framework of Standards which builds on the heritage, culture and environment of the community.

Youth leadership - promoting respect, responsibility, teamwork and cooperation among youth and their community; developing participatory and leadership skills in youth while promoting civic involvement.

Developing assets in youth by promoting reciprocal relationships within the community and helping children learn to thrive in their community.

Documenting stories of youth and community interaction and analyzing data gathered through the work.

Contact Information
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Walden's Ridge Rural Challenge Cluster - Tennessee

Structure
Project Director – Principal, Wartburg Central High School
Site Directors:
Oakdale - English teacher
Coalfield - English teacher
Wartburg Central - social studies teacher
Sunbright - junior high math & high school social studies teacher
Petros Joyner - elementary teacher
Morgan Vo-Tech Center - agriculture teacher
Student team

Schools & Districts
Central Elementary School (K-8)
Coalfield School (K-12)
Oakdale School (K-12)
Petros Joyner School (K-8)
Morgan Vocational Technical School (9-12)
Sunbright School (K-12)
Wartburg Central High School (K-12)

Partners
Lockheed-Martin Energy Systems
Tennessee Valley Authority
Bowaters Land Company
Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency
Frozen Head State Park
Natural Resources and Conservation Service
University of Tennessee Agricultural Extension Service
Central High School Renaissance Foundation
Historic Rugby

State & Local Organizations and Agencies
Obed Wild and Scenic River
Tennessee Baptist Children's Home
Big South Fork Recreational Area
Morgan County Historical Society
Morgan County Country Club
Museum of Appalachia
Cumberland Trail Conference
Cumberland County Playhouse
Tennessee Humanities Council
East Tennessee Conservatory
Jubilee Community Arts
Foxfire

Institutions of Higher Education
Carson Newman College - East Tennessee Foxfire Teacher's Network

Funders
Eisenhower Staff Development
Goals 2000
Tennessee Humanities Council
Big South Fork Oral History Grant
Lockheed-Martin Energy Systems

ARC Alliances
Appalachian Rural Education Network (AREN)
West Virginia Stewardship Collaborative
Project Albemarle Learning Center
TennGaLina Consortium

Networking Tools
Newsletter
Website
Walden's Ridge list server
The Student VOICE

Mission/Focus
This cluster believes in the importance of "Rural American Communities" where the transmittal of values from one generation to another sustains the concept of place-based learning and validates the merits of rural living.

Its focus is to learn how to integrate place-based work into the curriculum in the humanities, science, and math. The State of Tennessee has given local schools the opportunity to develop and implement trial curricula. These courses are then eligible to be formally added to the state curriculum for use in other places.

There is a strong interest in building bridges between the academic curriculum and the strong, service-oriented vocational, agricultural and technology programs at the schools.

Coalfield and Oakdale schools teach their children early and often that community history and sense of place are important keys to their survival as individuals and call on community people to help teach the children.

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Yampa Valley Legacy Education Initiative - Colorado

Structure
Project Coordinator
Core Teams in each district (teachers, students, community members)
Board of Directors (district representatives, Core Team representatives, community members, Great Outdoors Colorado (GOCO) reprepresentative, agency reprepresentatives)

Schools & Districts
South Routt
Steamboat Springs
Moffat
East Grand
Hayden

Partners
Great Outdoors Colorado (GOCO)
Community Performance, Inc.
Nature Conservancy (The Carpenter Ranch)
U.S. Forest Service
Colorado State Parks Service
Yampatika
Partners in Interpretation
Colorado Division of Wildlife
Colorado Historical Society
Peaks and Passages
The Tread of Pioneers Museum
Colorado Bureau of Land Management
Museum of Northwest Colorado

Institutions of Higher Education
Colorado Mountain Community College

National, State & Local Organizations and Agencies
Annenberg Critical Friends
Desert Research Institute (University of Nevada)

ARC Alliances
Vermont Rural Challenge
Bread Loaf Alliance of Rural Educators

Networking Tools
Internet Interactive Community Database (Pathfinders)
Core team meetings
Annual Institute
Website
Workshops
Email list server
Video conferencing
Videos

Mission/Focus
The Education Initiative seeks to develop and integrate into school curricula a series of multi-disciplinary, experiential, interactive projects centered on the legacy of the Yampa Valley that will engender in our students a sense of place and respect for our valley and our heritage.

Training is focused on integrating place-based educational concepts into school curricula as a means of meeting (and exceeding) the Colorado Content Standards.

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Yuba Watershed Alliance - California

Structure
Project Director
3 additional site coordinators
Community forums
Action Team in Camptonville

Schools & Districts
Camptonville School District (K-12)
Sierra Plumas School District
  Pliocene Ridge (K-8, 9-12)
  Downieville (K-8, 9-12)
Twin Ridges School District (K-8)

Partners
North Columbia Cultural Center
Nevada & Sierra County Arts Councils
Yuba Watershed Institute
Volunteer Fire Departments (Pike City, Downieville, Camptonville)
KVMR (community radio station)
Grizzly Hill Parent-Teacher Club
Spirit Walk
Camptonville Outreach Project
Camptonville Collaborative
Grass Valley Union
North San Juan Activities and Improvement Center
North San Juan Senior Center & Head Start
Golden Sierra Job Training Agency
Ring of Bone Zendo
Sierra Biodiversity Institute
Camptonville Community Church
North San Juan Methodist Church
Sierra City Methodist Church
North Yuba Ranger Station

Institutions of Higher Education
University of California at Davis: Education, Creative Writing
California State University at Chico: Education
Sierra College
Yuba College
Feather River College

State & Local Organizations and Agencies
Yuba Sutter Economic Development Corporation
Sierra Economic Development District
Nevada Union High School
Sierra County Health Department
California Fish and Game

Funders
Digital High School grant
U.S. Forest Service
Sierra Health Foundation
Nevada, Yuba, Sierra County Superintendent of Schools
Leocha Fund
Nevada County Title IX Office of Indian Education
Altaristas

ARC Alliances
North Coast Rural Challenge
Circles of Wisdom (NM)
Teaming with Nature (Selborne Project)
Yampa Valley Legacy Education Initiative

Networking Tools
Telecommunications
Computer resource databank
Cluster meetings
Ongoing topic-specific workshops
Local newspaper
Public art - visual & performance
Radio & cable TV programs
Website (in progress)
Cultural and Social events
Volunteer Fire Department auxiliaries and cadet programs

Mission/Focus

This cluster originated with community leaders and has always included local agencies, volunteer organizations and private groups as well as the schools. The Cluster includes home-schooling families and charter schools, providing them with opportunities to participate in project activities and interact with other students in a variety of ways.

Community Action Teams focus on public transportation, child care, community gardens, welfare-to-work, recreation and health concerns. This cluster has a welfare reform plan that will provide job training through community service programs.

The cluster sponsors evening or after school programs such as the Twilight School, staffed by people from the community, to provide recreation and enrichment activities to all ages.

The arts and the environment are strong focuses in this cluster and include a music CD and student art work which is displayed in public spaces. The cluster works closely with local businesses on economic development projects.

The cluster is developing alternatives to state-mandated standardized tests. Their alternatives will be connected to place-based learning and will assess the *whole* student.

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The Rural School and Community Trust (Rural Trust) is a nonprofit educational organization dedicated to enlarging student learning and improving community life by strengthening relationships between rural schools and communities and engaging students in community-based public work. Through advocacy, research, and outreach, the Rural Trust strives to create a more favorable environment for rural community schooling, for student work with a public audience and use, and for more active community participation in schooling. Founded as the Annenberg Rural Challenge in 1995, the Rural Trust today works with more than 700 rural elementary and secondary schools in 35 states.

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